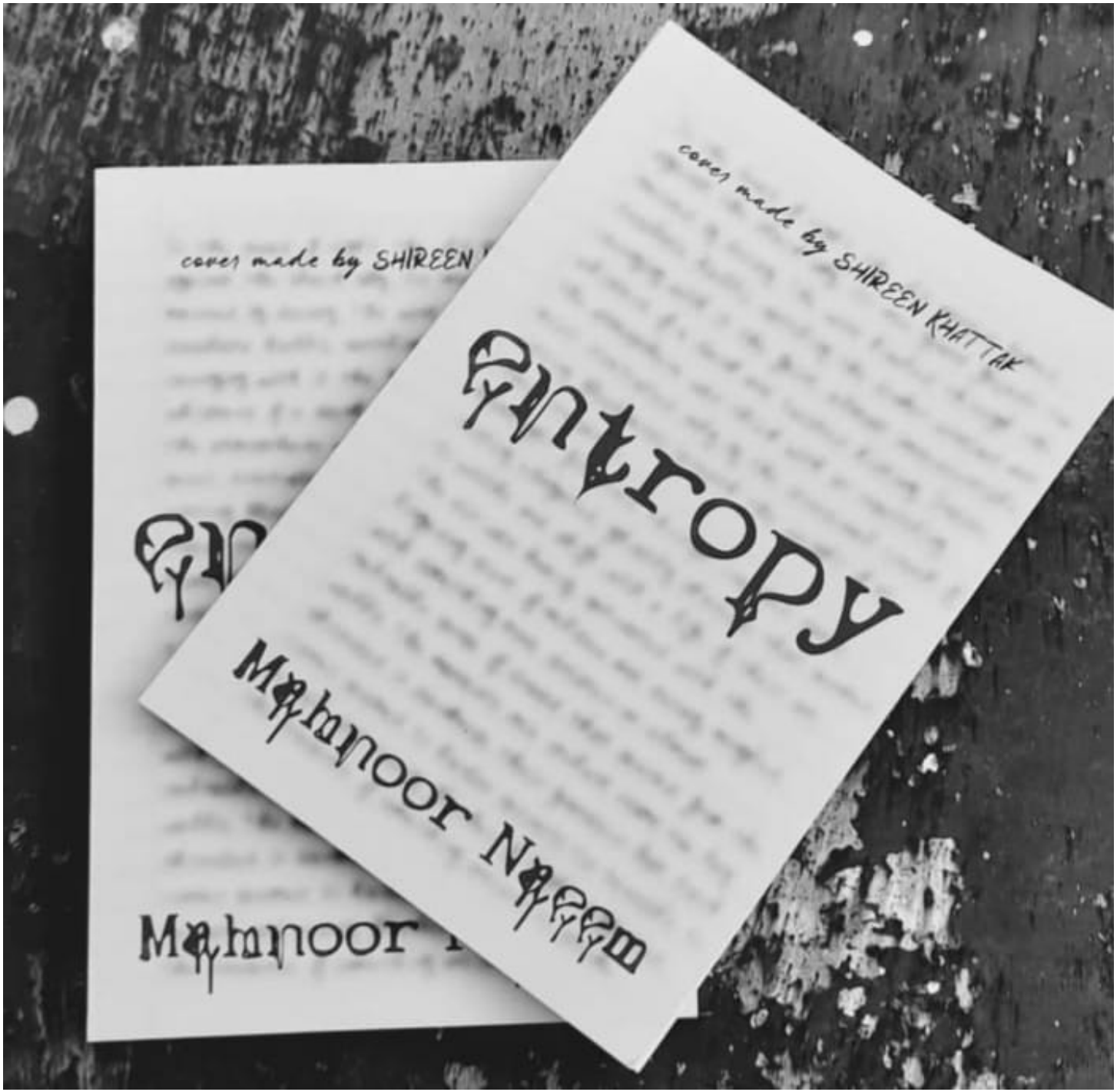

cover made by SHIREEN KHATTAK
Entropy
Mahnoor Naeem

ENTROPY

“Entropy of an isolated system always increases over time.”
~ Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Mahnoor Naeem

To the me who had to listen to the lectures of waking up late because I stayed up all night typing. To the me who listened silently, the lectures and warnings of using the laptop. To the me who stayed up late typing, while fighting sleep. To the me who told everyone her stories despite how uninterested they seemed. To the me who never stopped dreaming,
never quit her goals, and didn't mind being called 'weird'. But most of all; to the 8-year-old me who promised herself that she would be just as great an author, as Charles Dickens.
Without those parts of me, this couldn't be possible.

Maryam entered the house, a large but dreary residence. Her family had just moved in, and although their furniture had arrived and been set up a few days earlier, some items were still unpacked. They had only brought the essentials, like a few mattresses, crockery, and her school books. Her mother glanced at her from the living room, but Maryam refused to meet her gaze.

The house had three stories: a basement, ground floor, and upper floor. The first floor, ground floor, and basement were identical in layout. Maryam and her parent's rooms, along with a completely useless guestroom and a kitchen, were all on the ground floor.

Maryam went straight to her room. Looking at the baby pink walls and white cupboards she thought of how the room would've been nice, so would the house itself if her dad
hadn't taken so much debt to buy it. She had been against it, she didn't think it was necessary to buy such a big house when couldn't even afford it. But who listens to a thirteen year old? Maryam went to her bed and sat on it looking at the cupboards and then at the cardboard boxes containing her belongings that her dad had just placed there.

She started sorting everything. She hung clothes in the hanging closet, folded clothes into the racks, shoes in the rack under the hanging closet, old toys in the small cupboard under the rack holding the folded clothes. She stuffed her school bag, books and novels into the remaining racks.

All that was now left were some of her old course books she might need later. She was going to put them in the cupboard under the second rack holding her school books and novels, a small one-foot cupboard. Maryam put them in a stack, one on top of the other, and put it in the corner of the cupboard, but when she placed it in the opposite corner, it shifted.

Maryam got agitated; such an expensive house had damaged cupboards. She was going to remove the stack from there. She put one hand under the stack and the other in the center of the cupboard

for balance. The bottom dented under the weight of her hand.

After removing all of her books, she put both hands on the dented bottom and pushed downward, making the whole bottom shaky. One hand still pushing downward, with the other hand, she placed her fingers under the corner of the bottom that had shifted upwards when she had placed the books. She felt the corner, hardboard. She put her fingers between the space between the hardboard and what she assumed was the real corner, and then pulled upwards. She expected it to take some effort but it came out in one go, of course it did, she thought, it was hardboard.

Under the false bottom were books, arranged in four neat stacks. She decided to take them out and read them, or at least examine them, as someone had clearly wanted them hidden. Now that she thought of it, this cupboard's bottom did seem higher than the rest.

They were all medium sized, diary like, books. Two were lock-and-key diaries, but most looked handmade, with wooden covers. She opened the first page of one. There was a number written all over the page, 5. Another with the number 3, after checking all of them, Maryam arranged them in numerical order. There were 15 books in total.

Her mother called her for lunch but the excitement of what she had found and her being frustrated with them caused her to ignore her mother, though she knew it was rude, and shut the door. She took a deep breath and started reading.

3-5-1997

This is Jaden writing, from world war 3. I am an innocent man leading a hard life and I write from my underground bunker. My country is at present under attack of an army led by General Dad, who wants me to abandon land and leave it to them. What horrors they will put my country through! For all I know, they will destroy it because outside, next to General Dad stands ‘The Plumber’. Surrender is not an option.

4-5-1997

Let me just break it to you: I am not a soldier of world war 3; in fact I don’t think I want to be. I’m the kind of guy who enjoys his TV, phone, games, and computer, and so on.

But if you turn my house into the world, then we probably did have world war 3 or 101. Yesterday, Dad wanted to fix the bathroom flush, and I’m supposed to clean it since my parents are far too busy to clean it themselves. The plumber makes it impossible to clean every single time with his muddy boots.

So yesterday, ‘my country’ was my bathroom, and Dad was attacking it. Of course, I had to surrender and clean it afterward. Like why don’t they…… Never mind, I don’t want to say it.

5-5-1997

An introduction is a must. If I don’t give an intro, then maybe future me will forget whose diary this is, and future me would have problems. This whole diary is a ‘just in case’ if future Jaden forgets his childhood.

My name is Kios Jaden. The reason my name has the word Kios in it is that all my family members who were great have died. Thank God only 5. So my uncle on my mom’s side was a brilliant physician and his name was Kyle. My aunt on my dad’s side and her husband, Justin, whose last name was Indin, lent my parent’s money; Justin’s dead. A family friend’s name was Olaf, and he did something I can’t remember. The ‘S’ comes from great-aunt Susana, who was some kind of rights activist.

The last and the opposite of least was my parents’ professor, Dr. Jaden Mackle, who was a really great doctor, of I don’t know what.

So, K comes from Kyle; I comes from Indin; O comes from Olaf; S comes from Susana; and Jaden comes from Dr. Jaden Mackle.

My parents want me to be a mixture of all of them. Now it’s not pronounced Keeus, its pronounced Kaios, I don’t know why they couldn’t fit an ‘a’ in there.

Age, I am 10 years old, physically. I am my parents' only son and I am desperate for drama in my life, and the attention of my parents. See, my parents are doctors; my mom's a dermatologist, and my dad's a dentist and both have clinics running from 8 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., or you can say 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. cause that's the time they leave and come home. They even have a clinic on Sundays, I mean, why? Just why? If I ask them then they say 'it's for your better future'.

They even want me to be a doctor, just like them because according to them, I can earn better that way, I think they are very wrong.

6-5-1997

So yesterday I gave my intro and wrote about my not at all great parents. Today I'm going to write why I started writing a diary.

The reason for that is I've got just one friend, who has another friend who is not my friend. So, on my birthday, for the first time, he gave me a present and the worst part, instead of getting me chocolate like I told him, he got me a diary.

Then I figured since no one in my house or school really talks to me and I don’t have a phone yet, I could start writing a diary. So, basically, my diary is like a silent brother. But my cover story for all that, so people don’t pity me, is that what if future Kios Jaden doesn’t remember anything?

But since now I am officially writing a diary noting all this down in here, I am going to be honest and hide this. The perfect place for that is under a false bottom of the cupboard. Perfect plan. I love myself.

Oh and my full name is Kios Jaden Vilrian Benson. Vilrian is my mom’s last name, a weird last name. Anyways, no one calls me Kios Jaden, my cool name; they call me Jaden Benson or just Jaden.

What else should I write next? I am so tired and feel so cold in the bathroom, where I sit and write. So, that’s it for today.

****

The rest of the diary was just about Kios Jaden and his daily life. The second diary was also the same, it got interesting again mid-way through.

8-9-1998

Today I officially announce that I have no friends. Why did it have to be me?

My only ex-friend and his bestie had a fight, and bestie blamed me for it. I don't know why but that is nuts. He thinks I'm making them fight and told Mark that. My ex-friend, who, worst part is, believed him! I mean sure he's your bestie and if he puts you in a bestie or Jaden situation, you are going to choose bestie over Jaden but you don't just tell him you don't want to be around you but there's more, he told me I should be invisible or something, now I hate him.

I don't know what got into me but I started crying. Like seriously. The whole cafeteria was watching me cry, so embarrassing. I guess everyone feels sympathy for me but they are still going to pretty much laugh at me. Anyways, I don't even care about anyone; I'm going to change my school.

I'm still crying though, he was still pretty rude, and I still hate him.

9-9-1998

I told dad I wanted to change my school and dad said ‘no’. When I asked him why? He said it would affect my studies, like I care about studies.

Anyways, I did something awesome today! I made my very own mini robot that says hello and I completed the go-cart I was working on. It was originally for Mark to win his go-cart race and mom says I should give it to him and say sorry but no, never. I didn’t say things that made him cry, he did.

I Will Never Say Sorry To Mark, Never

10-9-1998

Since I’m pretty much stuck with no friends, I should most probably start on the whole spending-time-with-parents thing. I don’t know how that’s going happen and I’m not getting early or going to bed late and destroying my me-time.

I guess I should start brainstorming ideas. My teacher at school; no, my technology teacher, also the head of tech club; says I can do a lot just by brainstorming.

Oo talking of tech club I’m one of the 3 members of tech club, and its super fun though. My parents don’t know because they want me to take part in things that would later help me as a doctor, but it’s my career, my choice. My teacher Mr. Johnson says I can do alot with things with wires, but I’ll kill someone if it were not wires but nerves. So I guess I have to with the wires then. .

11-9-998

I created my first ‘best’ robot and a ton of other things. I’m so proud of myself, so very proud. So what the robot did was it could write; now the robot does my homework. All it takes is a small printer. I would have used stickers but that’s expensive. So it just goes over the book and takes a photo and then, it processes that and starts writing. I have to change the pen still works.

But that’s not how it turned out, so I just made a printer that has a messy writing style so it looks hand written. I’m not going to use it in the diary ‘cause if I do, it’ll feel like a must thing, and anyways, writing in here is fun.

12-9-1998

So, today was nothing special except, I got great marks in math even though I wasn't really expecting it, I didn't study a thing. Everything went normal really. And yes, I am also going to work on another device, a calculator. It's not an invention but I want to see if I can make it.

13-9-1998

Nothing special, but I don't want to write about it.

14-9-1998

I participated in the go-cart race. Finally going get my revenge

15-9-1998

I have finally done it!!! Oh my god I can't believe it!! But there's something depressing too, when I showed my robotics teacher all he said was "you can do better". So sad

16-9-1998

Something bad happened today, but not going to tell my little brother about it. Oh my god, I cry a lot.

17-9-199

I messed up so bad, I was angry about something and I brought my hand down on something and later I found out it was something made of glass. Now it’s broken and it was a decoration piece. I hate myself so much right now. Anyway I removed the bandage from my hand so mom is convinced it wasn’t me. She’s going to be so mad.

18-9-1998

Hi, I’m so happy today, mom didn’t have a clue it was me, but I should bandage my hand again or it’ll get infected.

19-9-1998

It did get infected but I applied paste on it so it’s fine now, hopefully. I don’t really care if it hurts or not, just that I heard if it gets infected badly, then they cut it off. Will it leave a scar though, ooooo that would be so cool, a scar on my left palm?

20-9-199

I love myself so much! I’m so awesome. i always think that don’t I. I mean I never think I’ve like ever thought that I hate myself. My English notes are so perfect, even my teacher complimented me.

21-9-1998

What the..?? I don’t know what happened in my class but my English notes are missing. Now I have to make them all over again. My classmates are thieves and despicable. I’m going to lock my bag from tomorrow. Thieves in my class, I mean honestly.

22-9-1998

It’s like there are sleeping pills in the air. Wait can we do that. Make a powder of sleeping pills, then put it in a spray and done, but no we can’t, you need a very thin mixture to put in an affective spray and I don’t think I can do that. So basically I am very sleepy because of working on my notes, again, all night. No one sprayed sleeping pills in the air.

23-9-1998

I’m alive and well, and my hands intact. Bye bye infection, I put a smaller bandage on it today.

24-9-1998

I’m off to summer camp!! I’m 90 % sure my mom’s going to check my bag and 100% sure she’s going to read my diary because my parents say that there’s no such thing as privacy and secrets between parent and child. Some parents they are can’t even spend a day with me.

So it’s better I don’t write or take it with me there, cause I’ve got a feeling she’s going to ‘react’ to my feelings strongly. So diary dear, I’m going to leave you home, under the fake bottom and pray mom and dad don’t find you, for 3 months.

2-1-1999

I’m back; I was back yesterday but still. And the best part is summer camp allowed us robotics. Plus I’m in the middle of end –of-term time. So it’s an ‘I won’t be around much’ situation. I’m super ready for my tests though.

The best part is in 1 month I’ll be in 7th grade and 5 months later I’ll be 12 years old and for some reason this diary is unending.

3-1-1999

I spent most of physical today, studying and mental today, brainstorming ideas about how to spend time with my parents. I tried making friends at school too but I just can’t like them ever since my notes got stolen. So yeah I failed at that too.

4-1-1999

Alive and well

5-1-1999

Busy studying, Revision 1-time complete

6-1-1999

Big news! Dad said ‘I love you’ before leaving.

7-1-1999

Every single idea of spend time with parents failed.

8-1-1999

Im so sick. Either I don’t get sick, or I get too sick. Hey maybe mom is going to stay home or maybe dad and stay by my bed all day. Tht would be great.

9-1-1999

Exams

20-1-1999

I’m desprete and in complete depression. Why are my exams so long! I’m starting a countdown so I have something to do other than worry.

21-1-1999

10 days to go.

22-1-1999

9 days to go.

23-1-1999

8 adays t go.

24-1-1999

7 days to go.

25-1-1999

6 days to go.

26-1-1999

Aaah, I’m going to throw up if I read black beauty one more time. Ugh, I think I have to though I still can’t remember all the names of the characters.

I think it’s because I keep thinking about what I could be doing if not this and to me even this is more entertaining.

5 days to go.

27-1-1999

4 days to go.

28-1-1999

3 days to go.

29-1-1999

2 days to go.

30-1-1999

1 days go to

31-1-1999

I’m done with exams. Oh my god! Oh my god! One whole month and now it’s over. I’m going to be in grade 7. And my birthday is months away. I’m going to turn 12. Woo hoo!

1-2-1999

February is finally here. Aaahaaa! Whoohoo! Yaahaa! Whoohoo! I’m done with exams. It is my first day free and there’s so much to do. I’m going to party all day. Get myself food, snacks and drinks. Mom’s coming, never mind.

2-2-1999

I couldn’t party all day yesterday, but I did most of it. I didn’t eat and drink the amount I thought I would but I enjoyed. When you don’t mind anything you can always be happy. I read a book for a while, while listening to music but then I got sleepy.

Anyway, while I was looking for songs to listen to I heard this song called ‘fantasy’ by Mariah Carey.

I like it. It matched the way I was feeling, easy going, chill, and free. I didn’t really focus on the lyrics but the music and the vibe matched mine. Then I couldn’t get the song out of my head because I listened to it for some while, now it’s stuck in my head. I mean I don’t even know the lyrics right.

I wanted to check the lyrics on ‘Google’, but it’s still so new. I mean people are entirely becoming dependent on a new search engine. I mean I’m just getting to know Yahoo. Google’s really new. It just came out last year, and apparently Yahoo’s not being used that much. It feels new. There’s literally not that big a difference except Yahoo’s purple and Google’s white and rainbow. But I’ve heard Google is more advanced. Anyways it sounds weird but I’ll have to use it since everyone else these days does so yeah.

I just had a thought; I’m going to Google why Google’s been named Google.

I just did that on my computer, and Google says it’s a misspelling of the original name which was googol, which is a mathematical term for the number 1 followed by a 100 zeroes. Also the first name was backrub, apparently many didn’t know of it then, but backrub was changed to Google in September, last year.

Hey what was I doing in September, oh wait I can know.

Well, I was just having mood swings in September, so I was busy doing nothing but whining.

3-2-1999

I just watched a movie about dinosaurs and I’m planning on not going there if I ever get the chance. I can’t believe I hadn’t watched it before; it came out in like, 1993, and I just watched it.

I love the guy in the hat. It’s sad that he wasn’t in the second. The second was good too but I think I liked the first more. I wonder when the third one will come out if it ever does.

My mom would never let me watch it again if she saw the scene where the guy’s hand was the only part left of him, or the greedy guy’s death! God, I don’t remember their names already.

It wasn’t fun watching it alone; it would’ve been way better to watch it with Dad, but he’s always so busy. I even try to stay up at night, but the minute they come home, they eat, I eat with them, and then they’re always so tired that they go straight to bed. I feel sorry for them sometimes, but it’s entirely their choice.

What was I originally talking about? Oh yeah, the movies, they were good. Oh no, I lost my train of thought. Oh well, bye, time for TV.

4-2-1999

Don’t send me away; I’m not useless, that’s what I told them. But no, they just have to. I’m doomed. I don’t want to go. I don’t like anyone there. I’m very angry today. I’ve got bad parents.

5-2-1999

I even begged them, and trust me, coming from my side, that is a lot because I’ve got an ego to feed. So I don’t beg just like that. And yet still they refuse. I mean, I don’t even like my aunt and I can’t stand my cousins.

They are so annoying; I can’t stand being in the same room with them for 3 minutes. Andy is whole 5 years older than me and he always holds that over me. And ugh, don’t get me started on how whiny Teddy is. Even their names suck. Ugh, I’m getting creeped out. No, please God, someone knock some sense into my parents.

But I know they’re never going to agree. They’re going on a trip. An out-of-city trip, and they can’t leave me at home alone because I’m not even 12 yet.

You know, sometimes I think they do all this long-hour duty for my sake, but then when these types of things happen, I remember their obsession with medicine. They’re going to Brooklyn for a general medicine course, or that’s what they told me.

Anyways, I’ve got to go pack, so yeah. Oh, and put you under the bottom, safely. Bye (I’m going to be very lonely without you, bro. I’ll miss you. I know you can’t say it back and I know you can’t feel, but it feels nice to say goodbye).

13-2-1999

I don’t want to write today. I’m back, though. My aunt was just as expected. I think the old witch—please don’t let anyone read this—hates me. I feel much the same. No, just kidding. Hate is a very strong word, but dislike is a more suitable word.

16-3-1999

So the reason I couldn’t write on 13 February, the day I came back, is that I slipped and my arm got fractured. It still hurts, but I’m pretty used to pain by now. I mean, whenever I take a bath, I always get a bruise the next day. So yeah, even if it hurts, I can write. I was in the hospital for some time, like 2 days, but I couldn’t hold a pen properly or even remove the false bottom.

I keep my diary permanently there now because Mom told me I can’t lock the door anyway, and Dad said if I did, then they’d check my room because of the way teenagers are these days. They turn out very bad, or whatever, so yeah. No offense, but to be honest, my cousin is an example. I hope I don’t turn into a jerk like him. I just freaked myself out.

17-3-1999

My hand hurts; I can’t even write.

18-3-1999

To my dismay, I’m going to school tomorrow; this is going to suck. Ugh, the same brats and annoying lectures on behavior again—another boring term with the same idiots to deal with.

I’m going to be a cold student this time. I’m just going to sulk in the corner until the tech club starts; the tech club is like a ray of sunshine in the rain.

Why is my life so boring? I hope at least someone slips down the stairs tomorrow. I also hope it’s not me because I already have a broken arm. Yes, it hasn’t healed yet.

19-3-1999

I checked info on atom bombs—God, it’s some insane physics. It’s complicated but simple at the same time. Mind-blowing, right? I saw people commenting on how they can create such evil things, but honestly, setting aside what it does, it is fascinating.

I like physics a bit more now. I mean physics has always been my 3rd best subject. My first is computers, my second is math. It’s not grade-wise because, like, we don’t really get graded in computer; it’s just practical stuff. I almost always get a 100% in math. I usually get around 97% in physics, about 95% in English, and 90% in chemistry. I don’t like biology, but I manage a 90% minimum in that.

We also had a choice between French and general science; I chose general science because studying French seemed like an impossible task to me.

Thanks to general science, biology, and chemistry, I always get a low percentage. I mean, everyone keeps telling me I’m smart, but smart kids always get 95% and above, and mine is always 95% and below. If it were up to me, I’d change biology to computers.

Computers actually make sense—logic, but biology doesn’t. Anyway, everyone tells me it’s the work of God, which it obviously is because all that seems impossible no matter how many logical explanations biologists find for it.

Oh, I didn’t notice while writing, but my hand just started hurting really badly. I can’t see it since it’s in the white thingy, but I’m guessing it’s not happy with my writing. It’s my arm, so I guess I should take pity on it. Bye.

20-3-1999

I need April desperately. I need to be twelve.

21-3-1999

I asked for drama; God gave me drama.

Mark and his bestie had a fight over something, and they can't blame me for it because I don't even look at them. So I guess Mark really found out who it was, and here's the best part: Mark doesn't have any other friends except Bestie, but Bestie is friends with the whole class. So Bestie isn't dependent on Mark for company but Mark is. I'm going to have to thank Mark's Bestie for getting the revenge I couldn't get. They say 'revenge tastes better, served cold'; they tell the truth.

22-3-1999

Yesterday, Mark and Bestie had a fight, right? And today was the best part. Yesterday was a good amount of drama, but, oh, oooooooooooh today can't be compared to anything.

Mark came and sat next to me in the cafeteria. He was acting casual, like we were old buddies, but I hadn't forgotten what had happened in this very cafeteria.

He started acting like we were still friends, but I wasn’t paying attention. I was too busy planning my perfect revenge. I think my trademark smirk spread over my face, and Mark mistook it for a smile. I think he thought I was happy he was back with me, but I had an ego to feed. My trademark smirk spreads over my face when I’m planning something I like, and it definitely wasn’t spending time with Mark.

Now my plan was ready, so it was time for action.

I sighed, all planned, and gave Mark a tired look. I said in my best bored voice, “When are you going to get up?”

He said, “C’mon Jaden, we’re friends”. Oh, perfect, he said just what I wanted.

“No, we’re not. In fact, I don’t even want to see your face again, so just get lost.”

Wow, I didn’t know I had it in me until he got up and I saw the dropped jaws of the students. I just looked back at my lunch, finished it in silence, and then made my way to class. So yeah, it was perfectly executed.

I’m so proud of myself.

23-3-1999

My schoolmates are so weird. They like me now because I roasted Mark? I did that to make myself satisfied, not for their entertainment. So now I have become someone special in school.

I blame Mark for the fight—a very one sided fight—with Nathan Marcos today. He just came out of nowhere, cornered me near a wall in the cafeteria, looked at me, and said, “I’m the only bad boy of this school”. Wow, bro’s so dumb. No one wants to be a bad boy because they only end up in jail. Why do something that lands you in jail?

And then he punched me. I mean, I have never been hit before, let alone punched, so yes, I was in shock. But once I was over my shock, I brought my fingers to my lip and looked at the blood.

There was a wicked smile on the idiot’s face when I looked up, so just to spite him, I glared and huffed at him. I knew he wanted a violent reaction from me that could start a fight, but I am a coward, and cowards don’t fight. I then put my hands in my pockets and made my way put out there, knocking his shoulder with mine. Even though I’m short, it gave quite an effect.

My lip healed after about an hour, and that's it. He didn't even try to punch me hard; I guess he thought he could knock me out with one punch. I'm not that weak.

24-3-1999

I'm alive, but I'm sick. It's like that bully cursed me. I want to cry. I don't need a fever; I need an April. Aprrrrrilllllll.

31-3-1999

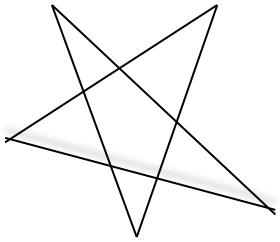
They admitted me in the hospital because, as I've mentioned before, I either don't get sick or get very sick. So yes, 102-degree minimum fevers for like, what, 2 days. I was in the hospital the past five days with nobody but my dad's friend Careen to attend to me.

My parents did come during the night. They stayed by my bed, stroking my hair, the first night. Then they both remembered that I often get this sick, so they decided to keep me in the hospital because there was no one to take care of me at home. This is why I have been in the hospital for the past 5 days, even when there was absolutely no need for it.

1-4-1999

April. Whoo hoo, aahaa, lala yahoo, yay. Just 29 days left.

□□□□□□□□□□□□



Oo, I want to do a count down. 28 days left.

2-4-1999

27 days left

3-4-1999

26 days left.

4-4-1999

25 days left

5-4-1999

24 days left.

6-4-1999

23 days left

7-4-1999

22 days left

8-4-1999

21 days left

9-4-1999

20 days left

10-4-1999

19 days left

11-4-1999

18 days left

12-4-199

17 days left

13-4-1999

16 days left

14-4-1999

15 days left

15-4-1999

14 days left

16-4-1999

13 days left

17-4-1999

12 days left

18-4-1999

11 days left

19-4-1999

10 days left

20-4-1999

9 days left

21-4-1999

8 days left

22-4-1999

7 days left

23-4-1999

6 days left

24-4-1999

5 days left

25-4-1999

4 days left

26-4-1999

3 days left

27-4-1999

2 days left

28-4-1999

1 day left

29-4-1999

It’s here, it’s finally here. Oh my god! I’m honestly so happy. I’m 12 years old!

It’s literally 10 in the morning, and I am up and at home. As soon as I got up, I took a bath, got ready, and started writing.

I bet my parents are putting up the decorations. AAA, I’m so excited. They are going to spend the whole day with me, which is going to be my birthday gift. Yes, I’ve thought of everything. I’ve even made a schedule.

12:00= birthday party

1:00= lunch

2:00= movie

3:00= shopping

5:00= amusement park

7:00= card/board game

9:00= dinner 10:00=looking

at old photos 11:00=bed-

time story 12:00=sleep

It’s not even boring. I mean, it’s all fun stuff that they can enjoy; everyone loves all this, and I’m only asking for 12 hours of their whole year.

I honestly don’t like my parents. Sure, we cut the cake, and they gave me a birthday gift, but honestly, that wasn’t really what I had waited all April for. It was the opportunity to spend time with them, and now it’s gone.

I gave them my schedule, and they stared at it like I was asking billions. I feel like they’d give me 100 dollars if I asked, but they can’t give me time. Because that’s what my birthday gifts say. They gave me their credit cards as my birthday gifts said it’s ‘unlimited’. Like, that’s what I wanted.

However, I realized they can’t give me time. If they prioritize giving me time, how would I lead such a luxurious life? Instead, I’m going to find another way to spend time with them because, truth is, I love my parents, and I want to spend time with them, but I can’t keep up with them in this race.

Nope! Stop, I’m not going to be an emotional cry baby again. I’m 12 now, finally! Great, I’m crying again. I really need to get a tear-duct removal surgery.

30-4-1999

I spent all night thinking about what I was going to do with the credit cards, and that’s when it clicked. It might or might not work, but it’s worth a shot. So I thought of it all night. I don’t know if my parents will approve, but, gosh, I need someone to tell. I believe that if I write it down, it will become ironclad.

1-5-1999

Oh my gosh. So it’s 10 p.m. I want to get a bike today because I need transportation. Also, I got skates and I’m going to start skating again; the last time I tried skating was 5 or 6 years ago. Anyway, I also got myself a Blackberry phone, then called my mom’s clinic’s reception and got an appointment. YAY !!!

2-5-1999

It’s 5 p.m. My plan was successful. I went to Mom’s clinic, where I already had an appointment. Mom gives each of her patients at least 10 minutes, and that’s how long I got. I paid with the credit cards and told her about it when she asked. Anyway, I spent 15 minutes talking to her about my day at school, homework, television shows, and stuff, and I guess this might work.

I’m back from Mom’s now and heading to Dad’s. I already had an appointment yesterday, and I also got the appointments for tomorrow.

It’s now 7 p.m., and I’m back from Dad’s clinic. He thought I actually had a problem with my teeth and needed treatment. He was kind of angry that I was wasting his time, but then again, I surprised him.

Then I went to McDonald’s and got a Mcflurry, and from Burger King, I got a burger and a coke. Now, obviously, I’m home, and I’ve finished my burger and ice cream. I’m currently trying to try to study biology, or I might fail. A B grade is failing for me. But then the clock in the living room isn’t working either. I could take a look and then study. Ugh, I really do need to get serious. I’ve got tests next month, or rather, in two weeks.

3-5-1999

Today was horrible: my parents are really bad parents. I went to their clinics again today, and Mom told me I was just wasting money. Dad asked me where I was getting all this money from. When I told him, he said, just like Mom did, that I was wasting their time and money. I just want to feel their presence in my life.

Honestly, sometimes I want to be a bad child. I want them to know that sitting in the principal's office every day would really waste their time. I want to stop studying and fail so that they're embarrassed at parent/teacher evenings and not hear praise.

I want to pick fights with everyone on the street so they know that going to the police station is what would waste their time and money, but I can't because I need their praise and I'll do anything to get it. It comes so rarely. Sometimes I want to be a rebel so they actually know what a bad child is.

My mom says my aunt can't raise her sons right, but actually, it's not that; it's my cousins. They don't care about my aunt and do all the bad stuff. In raising me, my parents have almost no credit. I can be a brat and a rebel if I want because they haven't even raised me properly since I was five. All that I am, who I am, what I am is all me and my… ugh, forget it. I don't want to waste my ink on stupid things like that.

******

Maryam often found herself reading the story. It was obviously was diary, as there was no plot or main story, which is usually found in a novel, though she was having second thoughts about that.

The third diary had a wooden cover with the number 3 craved roughly into it. The ink didn’t seem like ink either; it was of a dirty reddish brown color. The paper varied in shades, lengths, and thickness. Compared to the other two, it was significantly thinner. Maryam frowned after examining it, opened the book, and once more found herself between the words of Kios Jaden.

3

15-5-1999

THAT GATE WILL OPEN, but for now, I need to write something down.

Something crazy happened to me in the last few of days. I could hardly find a diary, and worse, there was almost no ink. I had to use blood—not human blood, but animal blood. It’s disgusting because my hands always smell like metal, which is what blood smells like.

It’s kind of sweet in an addicting way but sour in a… I mean, if it’s, like, your first time, it smells sour but the more you get used to it, the sweeter it smells. Plus, it’s, like, really addictive. So yeah, I usually have it on my fingers now, because that’s what happens with ink. When I smelled it the first time (I didn’t smell it but the smell of blood is really strong), I wanted to vomit, but now, as I smell it, I want to smell it more, like, well, now that I smell it I want to smell it more. It’s an addiction, I know. It’s also gross, I know.

I’m also just writing on random pages. I haven’t yet given this a cover. I’m going to go for a wooden cover.

Okay, I’m getting off track. I need to write what happened in the last few days because it’s really fuzzy, and I’m starting to feel like I’ll forget. What happened is so crazy, I’m having a hard time believing this is real and not some dream that feels like eternity, but I pinched myself the second I arrived and it hurt, so it’s real, definitely real. I’m going to keep record of everything that happens here so I can tell an adult. Like, “Look, I wrote it all down too.”

Okay, so I was having problems with my parents, the whole clinic thing. It was 4th of May, how could I possibly forget? I went to Mom’s clinic, and she told me that she could give any one of her patients the time I was wasting and that she could actually earn money from that. She said I was wasting her and Dad’s time, and well, blah blah blah…

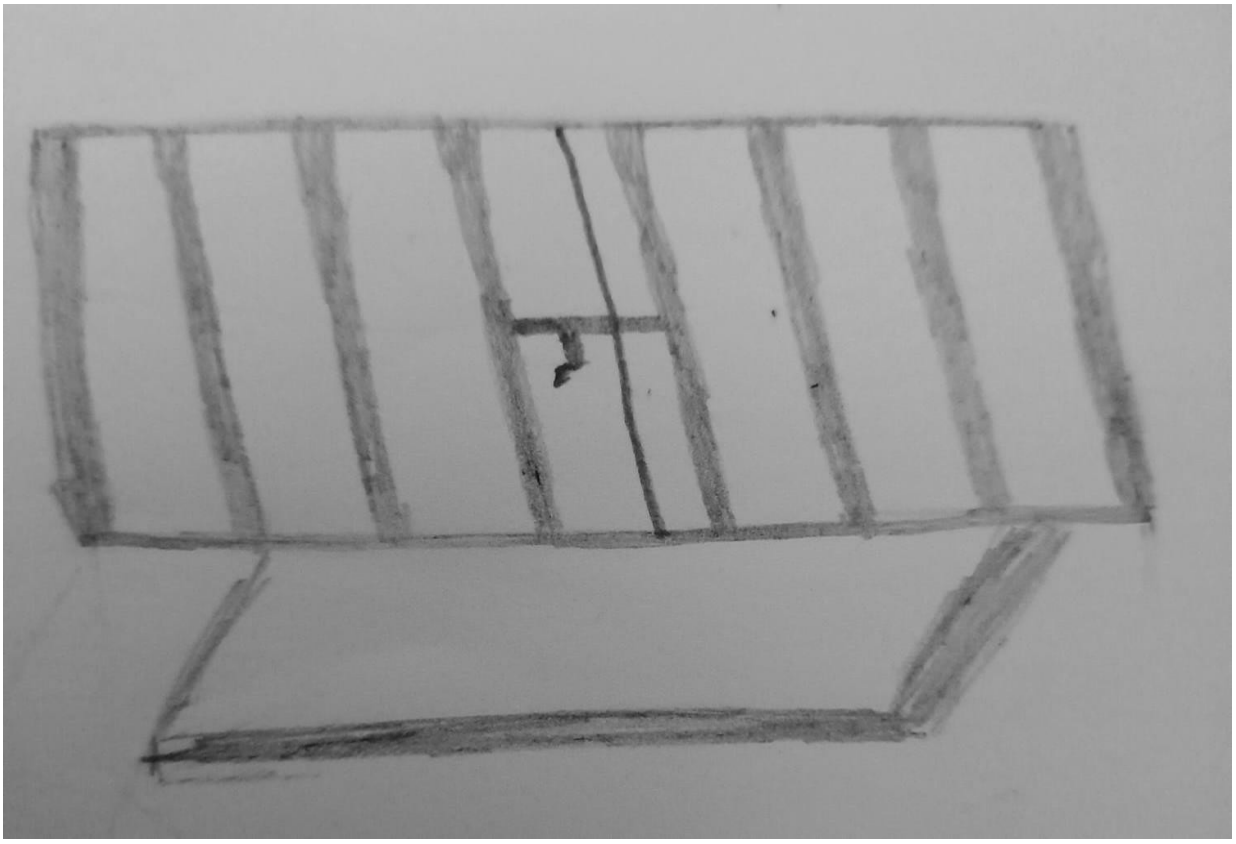
I got really angry and started to cry. I told her she was a really bad mother, that she didn’t care about me, and that she treated me like a toy, not a human with actual feelings. Basically, I said a lot, including that I was the crazy one, trying to make her and Dad proud. I remember exactly what I said before I left.

“You know what, I’m the one who’s crazy running after you, trying to make you proud when all it ever gets me is a toneless ‘Well done’”. I left the room with my heart beating hard. I could hear her saying something to me, but it got mixed with the background.

I stood in the reception for about 5 or 6 seconds, breathing hard, before she caught my eye. The woman was probably in her 50s, and she was dressed in rags, which was weird since my mom charges fairly high. She also had perfect skin, so what was she doing in a dermatologist's clinic? And weirdest of all, she was staring at me really intensely.

We made eye contact for what? About 10 seconds, and then I heard an ear-piercing sound of a bell, which was weird since there were no bells anywhere close by. I put my hands on my ears and shut my eyes, startled, and when I opened them, I stood in front of a gate. WEIRD.

I stood in front of a black gate, on a doormat. Or rather, a 'gate mat' because it's like doormat, but this was a gate, so gate mat. I think that makes sense. And on the gate mat, it said 'Welcome to the Rare Lands, rare lander'. That's the dumbest thing I have ever seen written on a doormat.



This is what it looked like.

I looked around and I was in a dessert, but I could see the sea that surrounded it, so it was a very small piece of land. There were really tall and wide walls all around because I couldn’t see where they ended. Plus, when I tried to open the lock on the gate, I couldn’t, because it literally vanished as soon as I touched it. What kind of thing does that?

I was convinced that it wasn’t technology. I thought it was a dream and pinched myself. I looking at my arm and wondering why I pinched it so hard when this man started to come toward me from a little boat.

He stood in front of me and started saying, “Oh, welcome, are you a new rare lander?” He kept saying ‘welcome’, until I told him to shut up. Yeah, I know, bit rude, but hey, I was freaking out. How can someone not freak out and be kind to annoying people when, in the blink of an eye, they land in the middle of nowhere from a perfectly urban city?

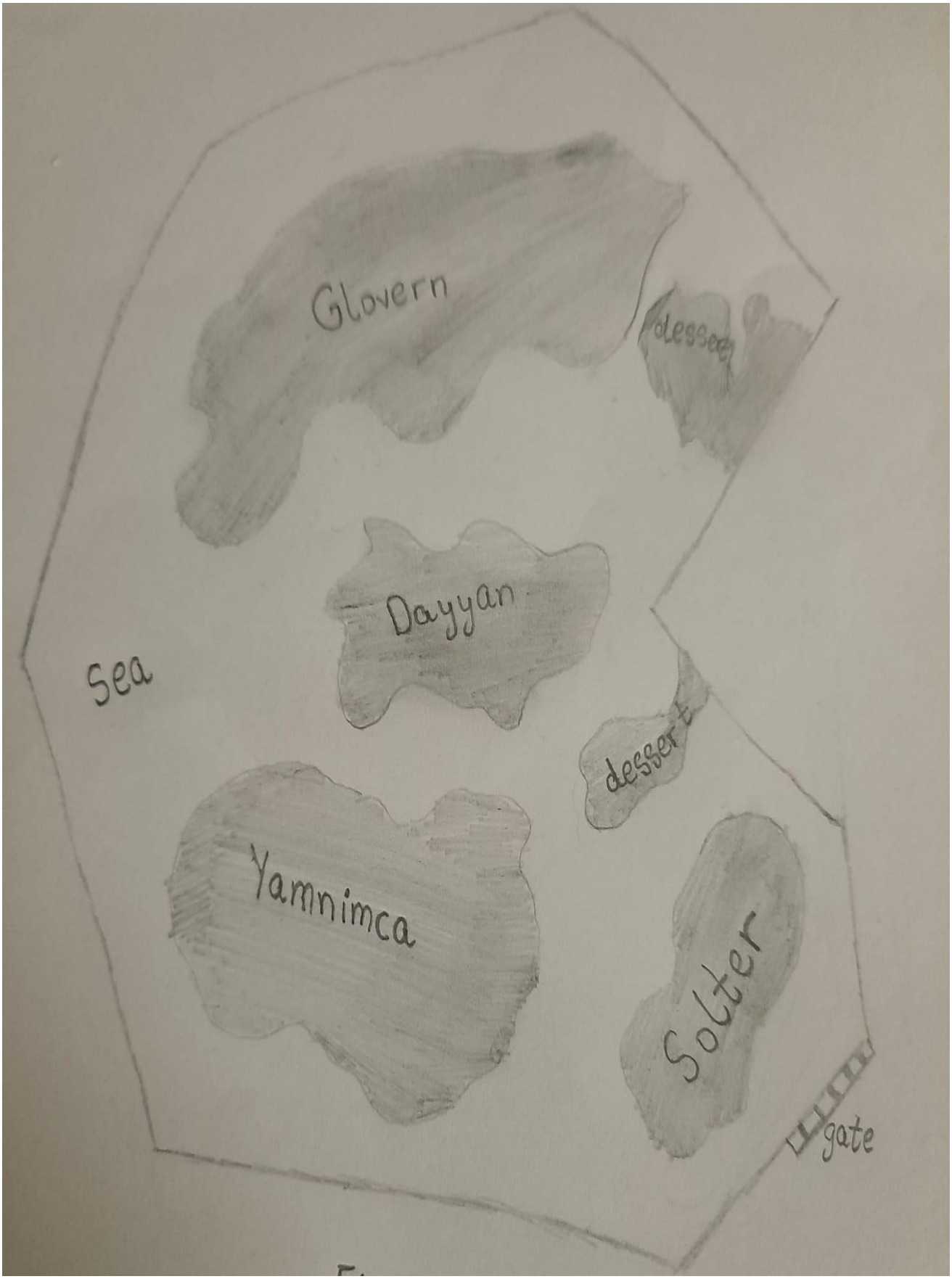
I controlled my temper and asked him where on earth I was, and he went like, “Earth? You’re not on earth; you’re in the rare lands”.

I was pretty sure by then that this guy was a psycho, but there was no one around, so I, kindly this time, asked him to take me to a place where there were at least a dozen people. The first thought that comes to mind hearing that would be, “This boy is mad, going off with someone who’s bonkers”. But I wasn’t mad; this was my rescue plan. I was going to ask questions about where my house was because staying in the middle of nowhere was worse than going with strangers.

Anyway, we made it to a town or ‘portion’, as the man called it. It was really far, and I saw some of other ‘portions’ too, but the guy said he was taking me to his homeland, ‘Glovern’.

16-5-1999

So I guess I’ve got some explaining to do since maybe, when I leave this place, I might forget what it looked like, and then I won’t know what the past me was talking about in this diary. Instead of writing the whole map down, since I’m very bad at describing places, I’m just going to draw it. It’s in a heart, or more like a Pac-man shape.


Glovern
desser
Dayyan
Sea
desser t
Yamnimca
Soltter
gate

The weird part is, it’s all walled up, and there’s this gate for an entrance, but there’s no way out. I need to figure out how to leave. Anyway, I’m currently in I-don’t-know-the-area’s-name in Glovern.

Starting with Glovern: this place has a king who chooses his heir from all the kings that are appropriate; I mean the kings to be, or I guess the princes, or…ugh. This is frustrating and I forgot the ‘real landers’.

Okay, first, the real landers. Rare Lands have their own people who live and die with the rare lands unless they’re murdered. The same goes for people like me, those who pop up in front of the gate, except we can’t die with the Rare Lands. There is no natural death; people only die if someone kills them or they die in an accident. And that’s why everyone thinks they’re blessed with immortality.

Because people think this place is really nice and a blessing, they don’t kill each other. People here believe they should repay the Rare Lands for the blessing, so they don’t do anything bad. They don’t lie, murder, bribe, act dishonestly, betray others, and so on.

The original Rare Landers, those who were born with the Rare Lands and those who will die with the Rare Lands, who I'm going to call ORL. They can sense when someone is lying or when someone has done something bad. Okay, so back the ORL story. The ORL are basically the rulers. It's practically racism, but either people don't know or they don't care. So there are 4 'portions', and all of them have a ORL ruler.

Glovern's ORL ruler, toward the time of his retirement, goes to all the people of Glovern, and asks which of his son's should be the next king.

Solter has this tournament thing; the king hand picks a bunch of candidates from the ministers, princes, and army, and they participate in the tournament. The winner gets the crown.

Yamnimca has a pure election, where people choose from all the ORLs running in the election.

In Dayyan, after the king dies, because they just wait for him to die without choosing a leader (no natural deaths, I'm guessing the king die in an accident, or they just don't change their king for centuries), and then the army appoints whoever they want (why they have an army, is beyond me) as a ruler. Mostly, it's the General, since they can't change loyalties as that's considered a bad thing.

Like, “General! A doesn’t want to appoint you king!”. “How dare A! He is traitor because he doesn’t think I’m good enough”. That’s so stupid!

Ugh, I’m never getting used to it, and don’t I plan to. I’m going to find the exit and leave, even if everyone keeps telling me that that it is impossible. I want my life back to the way it was, no extra attention, no drama, where I don’t use blood instead of ink. I want to not care about paying the rent, getting a job, or anything else adults do. I’m still a kid, a 12-year-old kid, who needs school, TV, video games, a normal life.

I didn’t think I would ever cry for home, but I don’t know what to call this other than that. Deep breaths—stop crying. I will leave this place. That gate will open, and I will go back.

But how?

I feel extremely tired and sleepy; my eyes sting from crying, I’m a coward. The whole world knows it. Its 1:00 a.m., K.J. out

17-5-1999

The only reason I can write down the dates is that I keep track of time; otherwise, I don’t think anyone knows the exact date here.

So I basically did something I've seldom done back home: I stroked my hair and lulled myself to sleep. Since I have a rented house, a room is more appropriate. I need a job to pay my rent, not to mention food and clothes. I never bothered with a job before, but I guess I need to now. I told the owner I'd pay at the end of the month, and he trusted me because of 'There can be no evil in the hearts of the blessed'.

When I ask people how to get home, they look at me like I've gone crazy and say, "Dear, why would you want that? You're blessed". And when I tell them I don't want that, they just give me a sympathetic look and shake their heads as if they actually think I'm crazy, or start laughing like I'm joking. By the way, people lie here by saying, 'I'm not lying, I'm joking', as if there's a big difference.

Yesterday went something like this: In the morning, I didn't eat, as that'll just cost me unwanted debt. Then I went to the butcher. He gives me blood to use as ink for free since he's going to throw it away anyway (they don't make ink; they don't write!).

I explored a little, but I didn't find a job or skill. Then I got paper from a guy who asked for his previous money (they don't write, but make paper; wonder why? I guess they don't have any squids here because I think that's where ink comes from). I just gave him a fake grin.

Evening came, and I ate two apples and drank water from the sink. I'll starve to death; that's all I ate all day. Why am I like this? I feel like I'm losing a lot, a lot, of weight. I mean, I guess I was 40 Kg before, but now I'm about 35 Kg in just a few days. I wonder who would sympathize with me. I keep wondering all the time, and surprisingly, I find the answer to be the same every time: no one. "We've been through more", they'd all say.

People called me skinny before, but that was always because people around me were burly, and I'm just not. To be honest I don't even like muscles; they make people look like triangles. I think after a few days, people would start calling me toothpick. I need money, or this will continue.

I miss everything more than ever. I don't think it felt true until I wrote it down. I really miss my house, but not my home because, like my teachers say, 'people make your home; bricks and furniture make your house'. I don't miss the people; I miss the bricks and furniture. So I don't miss the people because I'm used to them missing—no parents at home and no friends at school. I miss my comfort, my bed, my games, my bike, my TV, my room, my desk at school, and my robots.

Oh my god! That's what I'm good at!

Robotics—now I know my skill. I guess it’s going to be a fresh pair of clothes and 4 apples a day. Yes! Yes! Yes!!!!!!!! I am so, so happy. Oh my god! Yay!

Yay!

Its 5:00 am and I don’t know why I woke up. K.J. out

18-5-1999

So, I’m up and ready. It’s what? 1:00 pm, and I am starving, but since I can’t eat because I won’t have any money left—as if I had any.

So now that I know my skill, I’m going to go to the market place and find an electronics shop and start apprenticeship. It will be low pay, but still pay. I’ll update as soon as I come back.

After 10 hours
Right, so I came back home with a new and a completely different mission. From the start:

I left the room after writing and went to the market. From there, I asked directions to the creators' or skill's market. It was a place full of smiths, carpenters, and tailors. I entered a shop that looked like what I was looking for, but it wasn't. Then I asked again about an electronics store, but the guy just muttered something I didn't bother to hear. I left that market, disappointed.

Next, I went to a clock shop. I asked the owner where he got his watches and clocks from and how he got them repaired. He told me he got them from the new landers—meaning those who entered the Rare Lands actually wearing a watch—and sold them to him. However he didn't say a thing about they were repaired.

I looked around for more shops. Finally, a guy in a carpenter's shop told me no one had ever said electronics or mentioned fixing or making a cloak, except for one: "Cantas, and Cantas alone".

It's like you find one helpful word in a book reference or a yellow box in textbooks. Then you read a whole other book about that word, and it turns out to be what you need.

I then asked this guy who Cantas was, and he told me to watch the new king celebration. There is always a show on legends during the celebration, and then he was gone. I had no idea when the new king celebration would be, and I needed answers now, so out the window with that plan.

I went to the famous café, that's the name 'the Famous Café', that's it. Anyway, I went there and sat on a random table next to a random guy. I asked him about Cantas and found out some clues.

He said that Cantas was very famous and had been here about a century ago. When I thought about it, I hadn't heard the name before, but he seemed famous, which meant Cantas—so much for 'no evil in the hearts of the blessed' got killed.

He said Cantas was an inventor, a brilliant on at that. In the 10 years he was here, he created so much, and he lived in his very own self-made ship. That was all the common men knew. I asked some other people, but they didn't know more either.

I was getting up to leave anyway, but the waitress came and told me, quite angrily, that if I wasn't going to order, I better leave.

They say there’s no evil, but that waitress reminded me of witches. I left the café and went to a smith and carpenter’s shared cabin called ‘The Cabin’; God what is it with the names? I started an apprenticeship in both things. That’s going to make me a little richer. Woo hoo!!!

Its 11:45 pm and I…am…sleepy…and excited

Cantas huh…

K.J. out

19-5-1999

So, I have a task in mind: find Cantas. I don’t know why, but I really want to know his story. Why was he killed? What did he do? People love him here. For that, I am going to a story teller that sits in the Tales Shop. He will want money for telling me anything, which is a huge risk. I would ask him a question. Just one: how did he die?

I know it’s stupid, but just for additional advice I’ll just mention it to my boss, Bling. Actually, his name was something else, but everyone forgot it, as it’s been 200 years since anyone called him that.

I won’t let people forget mine. I won’t be some ‘nobody’, and I won’t stay for 200 years; I’ll be the boy who left.

Anyway, so Bling is 200 years old or older; he must be pretty… Hey wait. Bling is 200 years old, so why go to the story teller when I could just go ask Bling?

People I asked about Cantas said he was from Dayyan. Bling spent 100 years there, which was around the time Cantas must’ve been alive, since that was 100 years ago. Plus, Bling is a smith, and if Cantas was an inventor, then he would have needed a smith right? Excellent, I’ll ask Bling.
Perfect□□□

I came back the minute I got this new information. I talked to Bling, and it went something like this:

KJ: Bling, you used to work in Dayyan before coming to Glovern, right?

B: Yeah

KJ: Okay, so Cantas was probably alive back then, right?

B: Alive? Cantas would never. No; he’s still alive, boy, just lost.

(That got me more interested)

KJ: What do you mean, lost?

B: It’s a long story. Cantas always wanted to achieve something great.He was working on a major project, and he visited the Blessed Gate (eww, blessed) frequently.

KJ: And then?

B: Well, people say he left his ship in Solter Lake and headed toward the desert.

KJ: Did you say he went toward the gate?

B: No, I said he went toward the dessert.

(I see no difference)

KJ: Where did Cantas keep his inventions? Where was his workshop?

B: His ship, of course.

KJ: What about the Solter Lake? Can you tell me about that?

B: Yes, I've heard it's dried up. It was dry back at Cantas' time too. KJ:

Yeah…um…How does one get to Solter? There's no road, right?

B: You can't go there; it's been under lockdown for almost 2 years now.

KJ: why?

B: No one knows. No one goes in or comes out.

KJ: So—

B: If you want to know more about this, you should talk to traders.

And “traders” means Dayyan. I guess I have to go to Dayyan because Cantas headed in the direction of the gate. He wanted to do something big, and then he disappeared. If Cantas managed to get out, then maybe, just maybe, I could too. I need to visit his workshop to learn more about him. To find his workshop, I need to find his ship, which is in Solter. To find out how to get into Solter, I need to talk to the traders in Dayyan. So, my next stop: Dayyan traders’ market.

K.J. out

4

11-1999

11-1999

I’ve been searching for paper for the past months, and I found out that you can’t get paper unless it’s the first few months of the year. I was on a journey at sea then, or, well, back on Earth, but still. I looked for traders all day, like every single day, but yeah, I’m super tired, so I guess I’ll explain everything later.

11-1999

I’m back and well and in Dayyan.

This weird thing happened to me. I was just going to find traders when this kid bumped into me, laughing and running and looking back, and I thought ‘cute, little kid’s still play’. But when I was checking the time, my watch was gone.

There’s no bad in the rare lands, talk about that to the little thief. He looked about 7-year-old. I didn’t even see what he looked like. All I could catch of him was his blonde hair and huge grin, and how much frail he looked. Like I did when I wasn’t eating much.

Surprisingly, I wouldn’t have noticed if I hadn’t checked the time.
People say there is no such thing as evil here and that no one would do anything bad here; but there still are thieves in this world, and by this world, I mean the Rare Lands, since this is not Earth, I’m still having a hard time believing that.

By the way, I’ve been looking for traders for the past 3 months. The reason it took so long was a few disasters, some really long stops in deserts and whatever.

So I arrived in Dayyan in August. Then I got a place to live, a job, etc. All that took all of August and most of September. After that, I found out the thing about paper, so I ordered some from Yamnimca, and got the deal with a butcher close to my room. The paper arrived yesterday, and I picked it up from the ship. What happened during that time was absolutely nothing, nothing special that is.

I want to go look for a trader, but ugh, I’m so tired and my bones hurt and I need a bath. Seriously, my brown hair usually looks neat and makes me look nice, but as I’m a man who bathes in hot water and no other; it took me a long time to get water like that. I also didn’t have the time because my job is really hectic.

It’s past evening or evening, don’t have a watch, didn’t keep track of days, don’t know the day, don’t know the time, I’m going crazy with this feeling of being clueless.

K.J. out

11-1999

I went to a lot of traders today; like a lot; because this new ship just came back from Yamnimca, and those guys know a lot of stuff. I also kept an eye out for the thief but, since I wasn’t in main Dayyan, he didn’t show.

Also, I finally took a bath and now I don’t feel like road kill anymore. I heard this man complain about sun tan at work, but honestly, my skin is still as pale as before. I have grown a few inches, I’m told by this other guy with me at work, but I measured the other day, and I’m not past 6 feet yet, so I guess, according to my mom, I’m still short.

Anyway, back to the topic, I talked to them all; most were Dayyan to Yamnimca traders, but some moved to being Yamnimca traders after what happened in Solter, they used to be regular Solter traders.

Most said it was impossible to go in, though goods still do, as Solter is under lockdown. No idea why that is. I asked why, and one person, unintentionally, mentioned it was because that was a law. I asked how to end that law, and he told me something I hadn't even known could be possible: "Oh, the laws finish with the ruler".

He must've thought he made it clear how impossible that was, but to me… Well, I have other plans.

The Rare Lands turned one inventor into a hero. I have a feeling the other will be the villain of his story.

K.J. out

11-1999

There's this strange hope inside me. It actually might work. I'm grey on the inside—my true self. Not the self I've shown in this diary; this doesn't know me that well.

I show that I cry a lot, that I'm really scared of everything, and that I always whine. But in my true self, that part beyond my thought process, is grey—dark grey. By dark grey, I mean full of hopelessness, dark in a way that's scary, like the times I do things just to hurt someone really badly and I don't regret it later.

In the Rare Lands yesterday, I felt that part inside me—cruel and twisted. I don’t know how, but I just knew I was like that. I always used to think, until I came to the Rare Lands, that I was a jolly, happy, ‘not a care in the world’ type of kid.

I used to think that I didn’t often get angry because I couldn’t hurt someone, but now that I think back, nothing seemed to make me angry enough. Of course, being caged here has made me very angry.

I didn’t care about what people said or did unless they really mattered, like Mark and my parents—they mattered. Like that bully—he didn’t matter.

I’ve come to realize I’ve been hiding behind the mask of a nerd, a crybaby, a dependent person. My true self is a coward, a person who cares about nothing in the world if it doesn’t affect him, who chooses to fight fire with fire, who does everything for himself, who keeps his heart locked up in a metal box, who seldom smiles, laugh, or talks.

I was like that as a kid, but I realized soon that I didn’t have to be. I had everything, so why not change? The one thing I never changed about myself was my grades, though the reason for maintaining them did change. It changed from wanting something to dangle above the heads of others to pleasing my parents.

I don’t think all that is bad either. In the Rare Lands, I became my old self again. I started thinking about myself because I realized that, no matter what we do, at the end of the day, we are all fighting for power. In the race of survival, you run alone. Why stop and worry when someone falls or hurts their knee when you can get ahead of 5 people in that time?

The thing is, this race is tiresome; it’s a never—ending hassle where you slack off for 1 minute and you’re behind. Back home, this race starts when you grow up. You train for it slowly with little competition, one step at a time, and when the day to face it comes, you know how to keep a fair pace.

Back home, my time had not come yet and wasn’t going to for a long time, enough for me to learn how to keep my breath under control. In the Rare Lands, I was exposed to something I had been only just begun to learn how to do. The reason I want to leave is really to get out of this race and extend my deadline.

My goal is dead set. I am Kios Jaden; if I want something, I’ll get it, no matter what the cost. One way or another I’m leaving. It’s time to put the mask away until when I get back home.

Now I better stop differentiating the world between black and white; it’s about time I see it as grey, even if I see myself as the darkest shade because I know I will grow older, and if I grow up here, I’ll be remembered by the people of the Rare Lands as what we call a ‘villain’.

But doesn’t every villain has his own story, his reasons, his wants that grow into such needs that he goes to great lengths to fulfill them? It’s all tangled up. This is still a want, but soon, I have a feeling it’ll become a need.

K.J. out

11-1999

Solter, wait and watch; as the approach, so does the elite’s doom. (Ha ha ha—evil laugh) (Honestly, evil laugh is only to lighten the mood, though it’s not really evil. I smirked when I wrote that, and then I thought, I can’t write (smirk), so I wrote ‘evil laugh’). Future Kios Jaden, please don’t hate me for ruining your childhood. I was only just a child myself.

11-1999

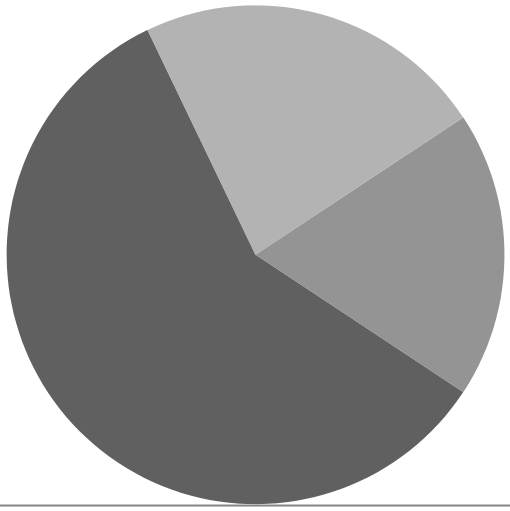
It could take a few—no, a lot—of days. But I am sure it will prove useful. My robotics teacher would've been proud of it, though not its purpose. It's funny how I read a book with a villain trying to do something like that—to conquer the world. He seemed like an idiot to me. But I guess my remarks on my idea would label me as an 'evil scientist'.

I agree with everyone who might find out about this; it's bad, but like I said before, I don't care. I've said so before: I don't easily get angry, but when I do, I'm fire, and fire burns everything in its way. Rare Lands, my dear, you are in my way, so you've got to burn.

1999

Okay, I'm not even sure if it's November anymore. Ugh, I am so clueless about the time.

It didn’t take that long. I mean I’m like this much done



Alright, back to work.

1999

I’m unintentionally creating suspense. I’ll write about what I made if it works. I mean—if I complete it. If not, then I’m burning this diary.
No, maybe I’ll just rip out the past few pages.

1999

I’m kind of excited.

1999

It might work.

1999

I could have nightmares after this, or maybe not, because I don’t feel guilty; they deserve it, or so I keep telling myself.

1999

I keep telling myself I don’t feel guilty, and hopefully that will kill that strange nauseous feeling that makes me sick each time I look at my progress.

1999

I’m actually having fun. It reminds me of my robotics class. It’s so peaceful. Anyway, I just wanted to write that down. The feel of wires between my fingers, the clicks and clangs of the tools, the coolness of the metal—it’s just so relaxing. It reminds me of home.

I guess it’s my cornerstone because my grandmother used to say, when she was alive, that the things that remind us of home and bring us comfort are our cornerstones.

1999

10, 9, 8

1999

7, 6, 5

1999

4, 3, 2

1999

1, 0, done

1999

I did it. I just can’t believe it. I’m still not sure it’ll work, but it has to. I don’t want to wait any longer. I had to wait yesterday because it was done a few hours before midnight, and, well, there’s a little red light on it that screams “look at me”. So, I’m going to launch it today when the sun rises. Then the red light won’t be as easily seen as in the night.

I didn’t sleep. I was far too excited for that. Also, I couldn’t stop staring at it; it’s what one calls a masterpiece. It’s my best work yet. I feel like a father today, and I’ll feel like a proud father when my little creation performs its job perfectly. It’s my creation, and I am in love with it.

The guilt I’ve been holding onto for the sake of being a good person is gone. I guess my grip loosened, and it flew away when I set eyes on my project.

1999

It’s been launched. I am so happy; I’m overjoyed.

1999

So, the project—the machine I made—works something like this:
It has a rough black surface and will be placed in an area where sunlight can easily reach it, allowing it to absorb the most heat. This heat will be stored continuously until it reaches boiling point of the human body. Once that happens, it will no longer be able to maintain the heat, and due to the intense particle movement, it’ll blow up, causing the king to be boiled up into the air.

Of course, the temperature won’t stay that high for long, but when you cut someone’s throat, it could heal like all other wounds, but it doesn’t because the damage is already done—the person is already dead. So, when everything cools down, the king won’t be alive because he will already dead.

What I actually made was a machine attached to a robot that functions like a spider. I also added a camera to it. My goal was to terminate the king and all the members of the tournament. Any sign of a ruler was to be wiped out.

Now I needed more of them for each person. Originally, I was going to make just one, but then I made 30: 10 ministers, 1 queen, 3 generals, 5 princes, and 10 candidates. I also considered the possibility that the heat might dissipate from the machine at night, so instead of placing it where the sun’s heat would reach it, I would attach it to them.

The heat of the sun ceases at night, but the heat the human body maintains its own temperature. However, at a certain point in the conduction process, the object can become hotter than the source, leading to a reversal.

So I designed it to ensure that it doesn't get hotter than the body until it reaches the boiling point. I created a large mass because conduction would spread the heat to all parts of the body, attempting to distribute the heat evenly to all parts. It's basic 5th-grade physics. I also engineered it to divide; the large mass would separate into smaller masses, each collecting the same amount of heat. I would just connect them all together. Eventually, it would become unbearable for the machine to retain the heat, causing it to blow up.

For certainty, I checked the boiling points. How? I got a goat and had the butcher kill it because a live goat scares me. I had the butcher remove the hair and leave the skin so I could determine how much heat was needed to see the skin boil. I then began heating the goat until the liquid form of the meat, blood and skin started to boil. After that, I did some basic math, and it seems like it might work.

I'm going to say this, even though I know any student who hears me might think I'm crazy: education is seriously useful, not just for a career but everything in life. I don't know what I would do without all that physics knowledge. I guess I would have had to murder 30 people and get caught red-handed—literally. It's funny, though. I thought education would me make a great man help save lives, but I guess it can help end them too. No wonder superheroes always have ridiculous superpowers while the villains rely on their intelligence.

1999

To most I might seem creepy, but to me, I seem logical. Those guys are living unnatural lives. I mean, it’s been 300 years since the king was born. They all have lived more than 100 years. I’ve heard immortality can be a curse for good men; if they’re good men, then they probably await death eagerly, so I’m doing them a favor. They probably want to die, so yeah. They need to die.

1999

I just thought of something: we want to live great lives because we think they’re short. We accomplish and get motivated to do something because we feel that if we don’t do it now, we might not be able to do it ever—because we might die the next second, which is obviously possible. Here, people know that’s not possible. They know they can’t die.

In fact, everything that’s temporary is precious and meaningful. You want to keep it close when you know it might get lost. Take money, for instance; you keep it locked away, you keep it close, you spend it with care, and you try to forge more. But if you have a lot of it, you spend it senselessly. Money loses its worth and meaning when in the hands of the rich.

In the Rare Lands, the people have a lot of years of life to waste; life has lost its worth and meaning. Your life describes you; if your life is meaningless, so are you, and I can’t stand being meaningless.

1999

The butcher I go to was asked by another man who I was, and he said, ‘some boy I don’t remember the name of’. He didn’t know my name even though I've been visiting him for a long time.

Don’t worry, my dear Rare Lands; you won’t forget my name once I leave. My name will be printed in your minds as the boy who brought death to the Rare Lands. Mark my words—I won’t leave quietly as ‘some boy’.

Let a few years pass. Wait and watch; I promise I don’t make empty threats. Just wait for me to become what I need to be. Just a few years, I won’t stay ‘some boy’.

Leaving on that pleasant note, I won’t be writing until it’s done.

K.J. out

1999

I did what I had to do. I activated everything and all that in the last few days and was excited for it all.

Anyway, I'm going to take the first ship to Solter and wait at the gates, because the king and everyone should be nothing by now, since I fully activated the assassination project yesterday.

Some people might think 'why not just poison them' but if I did that I wouldn't be relying on my abilities but others', also I might've gotten discovered before I wanted. I need Canats' ship before anyone knows it was me, before I get caught.

Anyway, got to go pack because I've got nothing to do in Dayyan anymore, I'm either off to Solter or to prison. They might not have one, but who knows with these guys.

1-1-2000

WELCOME TO THE 21ST CENTUARY!!! And happy New Year

It's my first new year without my family. It used to be the day my parents stayed up all night, and we went to get ice-cream even though it would be winter. We'd watch the fireworks, and Dad told jokes while Mom told old history stories; it used to be so much fun.

I can’t get ice-cream this year or be with Mom and Dad, but I promise I’ll be with them soon as I can, and I’ll get ice cream as soon as I go back. It’ll be the first thing I do.

I found out it was New Year because I was walking on the street and everyone kept saying “happy new year”. I can’t stop grinning; I finally know what date it is. Yay I feel 12-year-old again.

They do spend New Year’s; I got free food. I was sitting in a coffee shop because I wanted to see how coffee tastes (I don’t like it by the way), and they were giving it away for free because why not? It’s New Year.

Ugh, I’m getting off track. So, what happened in the past few days? I lost track of calendar, right? Well, guess what, it was 29th of December, 3 days ago. I went there and encountered some guards, and we had a little conversation.

Me: I want to enter the city.

Guard 1: Sorry, kitty cat, but it’s under lockdown.

Me: Don’t all laws get dissolved when the one who made them is no longer?

Guard 2: What do you mean?

Me: I heard a rumor that your king’s dead. Guard

1: Oh, umm, yeah.

Guard 2: So it’s the end of lockdown?

Guard 1: I guess.

Me: You should open the gates and let me in.

Guard 2: You can come back next year, 1st day of January, 3 days from now.

Me: 1st January 2000?

Guard 1: Yes, yes, now off you go, clucky.

So I was off.

I know the guard’s weird, but he was also stupid. It’s always the stupidest of the lot that get to guard the gate, because what could be simpler than opening the gate? Yeah, except that’s what you don’t want happening.

Anyway, I stayed in the ship that brought me from Dayyan for the rest of the time and went in today. It took all morning to get inside, and it was really crowded, so I'm going to look for the ship tomorrow.

2-1-2000

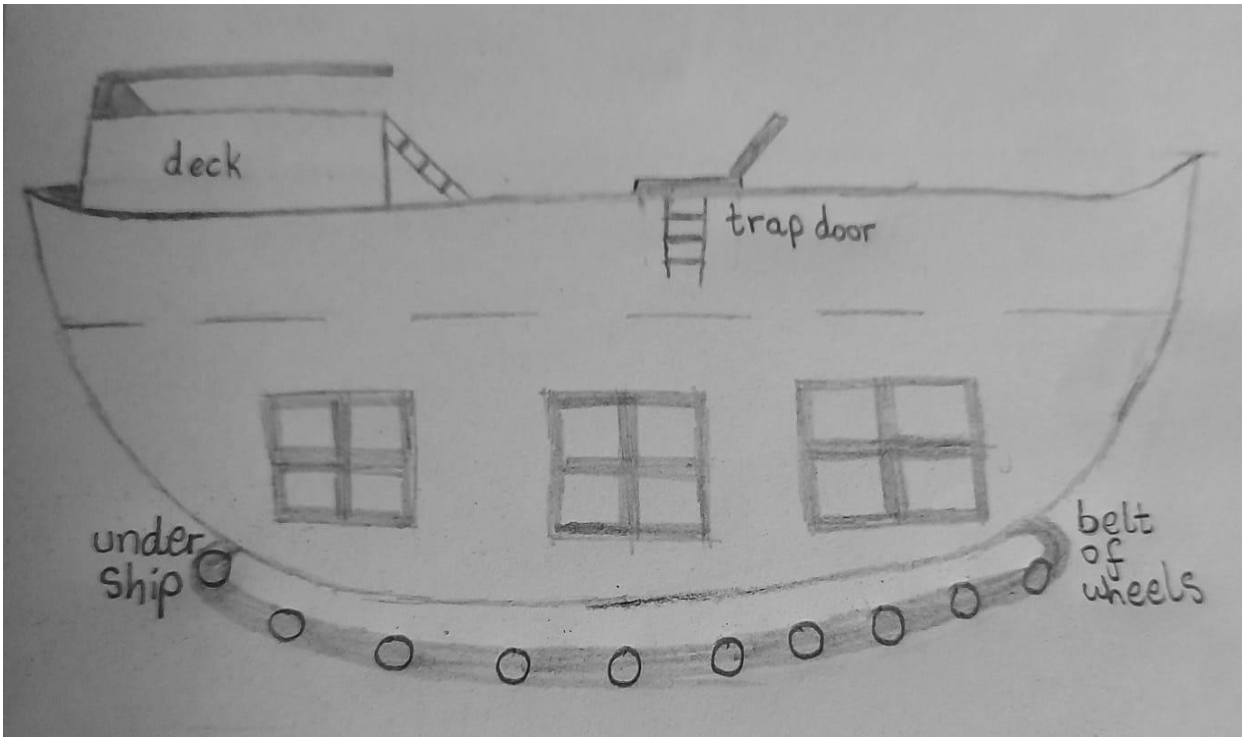
I have news.

News is… no, stop; I'm going to start from the top.

So I went in yesterday, right? Then I went to an inn and stayed the night there for free because everything seems to be free on New Year. I asked directions to Solter Lake and haza! I made it there.

It was right there, in the middle of the city, in a dried patch of land that was supposed to be a lake once. It looked so beautiful; it didn't even look destroyed even though so much time had passed. The people seemed to be steering away from it like it was a bad omen, not that I believe in those.

It was polished red-brown, one story with a deck, three windows on each side, evenly spaced. I can't really describe it; I need to draw it. I suck at drawing but yeah, I'm going to insult it. Oh God, have mercy on the poor thing.



It was like love at first sight. It, of course, was a little rusty and needed repairs, but I still loved it. It was a ship, so with a little work, I could turn it into a cruise ship, the kind people live in. The main structure's all intact.

I love it, have I mentioned that enough times?

3-1-2000

So I've started work on it and I'm super excited, but of course I searched the whole thing first. I found something epic. It's the map of

my way out; it is actually the blueprints of a pendulum clock. It is a little complicated and again it’s physics. This is how it has to work:

I’m just going to build a normal pendulum but I guess it should vibrate 10 times more. I’ll just put it close to the gate and the lock would, due to the vibrations, open and boom! And all this is because it disappears on touch. So you trick it open! Smart humans can outsmart stubborn magic gates.

4-1-2000

So it turns out there’s good news and bad news.

BAD News:

Turns out you can’t use normal stuff in the pendulum. Only the objects Cantas used in his pendulum can be used because the weight, width, and height have to be accurate. The thing is, all those pieces are broken and in a bad state, and apparently lost for now.

GOOD News:

Cantas, being an amazing person, made an estimate of where the pieces of the pendulum could land when it blew up due to intensity of the gate opening, and marked them on a map too! I just love the guy and his ship.

11-1-2000

So the reason I wasn’t writing is that, while getting lost completely in work, I also lost my diary. I found it today during clean up. By the way, I’m done working. The ship’s not as large as a house, but it’s the size of a double-decker bus, and it’s really cramped, but then again, it’s only me.

12-1-2000

I did a little research, and it turns out I do need help. Apparently, most of the owners of the things of the pendulum are stubborn and don’t want the gate to open because most of them are ORL, and if the gate opens, they die.

I thought everyone was supposed to be good in the Rare Lands, and good people aren’t selfish, but look at them—they’re being selfish by valuing their lives over a little child’s freedom.

So I’ll need a thief (hard to find), a bodyguard because of my cowardice (maybe I can talk someone into it, “hey it’s not bad, you’ll be protecting a child”), and an advisor. Because my brain only works when machines are involved, I need to be under some else’s watch because I’m also an extremist.

13-1-2000

Okay, now that I’m finally done with my more-beautiful-anything-in-this-world ship, I finally had the sense to go out and ask why they put the lockdown.

Big epic problem-solving news:

So, like a year and some months back, people were found dead. The 1st man was found dead in a street with the number 1 carved on one cheek the words ‘my pleasure’ on the other. Every other body was found in the same state with a different number. Except, next to the first dead body, written in blood on the floor were the words “I am Nefoura”.

So basically, no one could catch Nefoura. It’s the name people from the Galaxy Nefoura use outside their galaxy, but none of those people use that name anymore so you can’t blame them either.

(Have I mentioned that the Milky Way and Andromeda aren’t the only identified galaxies?)

They also don’t know the gender, age, real name, appearance or anything. They know nothing.

By the way, I've noticed there's a pattern in the murders, twice a month; also, each of the victims is really old. Some are 300 years old, 400, 450 and so on.

I think I found my bodyguard. This murderer is like me; they don't like the Rare Lands. Though who am I to call someone who only killed 2 people in 1 month a murderer when I killed 30? At least this one has a style and is admitting what they did, rather hiding and lying, like me.

~~Mission1= Cantas~~

~~Mission 2= Cantas ship~~

Mission 3= find/recruit Nefoura

14-1-2000

So, umm, funny thing—I also found out who and what they're blaming for the deaths of the royal family. So there's this really old and evil magician in a prison in Yamnimca, and everyone's saying it's his evil dark magic that killed them, because people don't just vanish into thin air, leaving behind gross liquids. I bet he doesn't even know what happened. Oh, so another guy to add to my recruits list.

~~Mission 1= Cantas~~

~~Mission 2= Canats ship~~

Mission 3= Nefoura

Mission 4= old evil dude

15-1-2000

So I am still on the lookout for Nefoura.

16-1-2000

I’m not going to write anything until something happens and start a job too, or……

2-3-2000

Oh God, not only did I find… I should probably write the top.

I went to a restaurant and sat at a table. I don’t know how, but I guess the fact that I was asking around about Nefoura for so long must’ve reached the person of interest.

Okay, anyway, I was sitting, right, and this hooded figure comes to me. The hood was lowered over the face so I couldn't make out much. It was a little girl, 8 or 9 at most. She spoke in a whisper, "Come with me". I knew she was mysterious, so I followed. I'm stupid that way.

I, of course, was armed; I never went anywhere without a pocket knife, especially now that I knew there was a murderer on the loose.

She led me to an alleyway and put a knife to my throat once we were alone.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa", was I could manage.

"Why are you looking for me? If you want to stop me, hear this: many tried but couldn't find me, and those who could are now dead," she spoke through gritted teeth.

"I can't really talk with a dagger at my throat, can I? So maybe hear me out first, and then decide if you still want to kill me," I proposed.

She loosened her grip on the dagger. "Talk."

“I have a proposal for you. Why can you trust me and what is my proposal? It’s better we talk about that in my ship. But I can convince you that I don’t want to hand you over to the cops, and I’ll tell you why if you walk with me to my ship. I’ll tell you all that when we’re close. It’s a crowded place, and you can runaway easily.” She didn’t look that convinced, so I added, “And you can stab me easily with your dagger too.” I gave her my best ‘so-what-do-you-think’ look.

She let me walk some way, then put a dagger near the middle of my back, concealed in her hood. She stood on her toes as she barely reached my shoulder. She leaned in and whispered, “It’s a knife; don’t insult it by calling it a dagger. No one cuts birthday cakes with daggers”. I have got to say, that got me interested.

We left the alley and started towards the ship. When we reached the ship, she made me stop a few meters away.

“You said you have something to tell me”.

“Yes” I replied, “but not all of it here. You won’t believe me unless I show you anyway”.

“Ugh, tell me already”.

“Okay, jeez”.

“Just say it already, no more ‘okay’ or ‘wait’ or any other excuse”.

“Fine. You remember two months ago the royal family mysteriously vanished, and everyone knows they’re dead and thinks the evil dude, the prisoner in Yamnimca, did it. Well, plot twist—

“They’re not dead?” She sounded astonished.

“No, they are dead but I—“

“Oh God! You killed them because you’re the Yamnimcian prisoner?”, Now she sounded excited, like a fangirl.

“Would you listen? I’m not the prisoner, but yes, I did murder the 30 members of the palace. And not with what everyone believes, not magic, but technology”.

I was thought she would ask what that was since she is from another galaxy, but instead, she asked, “Can I see?” Then again, I was talking to a 9-year-old.

We went inside the ship and long story short, I showed her my tech stuff—broken but I was going to fix it—the blueprints, and the engine room. Her mouth fell open when I started explaining the engine room to her. Then we went to the main launch.

“Why do you need me?” she asked.

“Have you ever heard of Cantas?” She nodded.

“Ever heard of the story that he disappeared?” She nodded again.

“Well, I think he didn’t go missing, I think…… he went out the gate”.

“Is that possible?” She stared at me wide eyed.

“Maybe, I mean yes.” I started showing the blueprints. “See this is a blue print of a pendulum—“

“How can I help? And can I leave too?”

“Yes to the second; this just opens the gate. As for how you can help, well, you see…..” I told her about all the scattered pieces and how I needed a thief, a body guard, and a someone smart, and then she did a humph and said, “I’m really bad at theft, and I’m not sure you want my advice, but my specialty these days is assassination. It’s because I don’t think before I stab people, so am I in?”

“Yes, of course you’re in”.

She smiled, then said, “Don’t you offer people tea?”

“I would but I don’t have tea. I don’t like tea or coffee”.

She smiled softly again, and we fell silent. Soon, I got bored of the silence, and my curiosity won over. “So what’s with the ‘knife’?” I made sure to air quote ‘knife’, “And becoming a serial killer?”

“Oh look who’s talking”.

“Hey, I told you my reasons, time you told me yours”.

“Okay, I guess my story might take some… I don’t know…… explaining. You should sit down; it’s kind of long”.

“Long? Oh you mean the explaining. Oh okay”. As I’ve said before, I’m kind of stupid.

I sat on the chair. Oops, almost forgot: I decorated the ship; I’ll draw a map later.

“When I was 8 years old, one year ago, it was my birthday and I was so happy. We had the whole place decorated and all, and Ma and Ba gave me a birthday gift. The whole place was setup, and I was dressed as a kitten.” She had a faraway look in her eyes.

“But……right at the moment when I was going to cut the cake—right before the knife touched the cake, seconds before—I heard a bell ring. It was so loud that I squeezed my eyes shut. Then the gate thing happened, and I made my journey to Solter. I hated everyone in this wretched place and every second I spent here.

After finding out about the death system here, I figured I’d help nature by killing anyone above a hundred years, but only twice a month. And I don’t like to hide either, so I made my name know. Didn’t want to be forgotten or worse, named by the Rare Landers. Who knows what they would’ve named me?

The knife is the one I was holding when I came here, I brought it with me. I bought the hood though, I’ll take it off since, God, it’s hot in here.”

By the way, I should describe her.

Nefoura was wearing a white hood with not a single stain. Under that, she wore a grey shirt and blue denim jeans, spiky black ankle boots. Her hood reached her knees; I guess she’d grown a lot in one year. Her hair was choppily cut and uneven; but here’s the shock: silver and glowing silver, and it looked so cool. She had dark-purple eyes and snow-white skin, as if there was no blood. I mean my skin’s pale white, but her skin is just white, plain colorless glowing white.

“Oh”, she started. “And I’m now a K.T.B fan”.

“What?” I laughed.

“Kill by Technology,” she chuckled. “That’s what I’m going to call you”.

“I’m good with my old name”.

“I don’t know what it is, now do I?” “I

haven’t told you my name yet!?”

She shook her head. I smiled, embarrassed. “Sorry, it’s Kios Jaden”.

“Othrera Nefoura from Nefoura. I’ll tell you the long story of why you must call me Nefoura another time”.

I showed her to her new room and went to mine; it seemed she had no stuff.

The reason I didn’t add Vilrian Benson is that I’m only going to be Kios Jaden in the Rare Lands, no past or relations attached. Our last name tells the world about our families and their deeds, but our first names tell the world our story, and our stories define us. We should tell the world our story, not others’.

~~Mission 3=Nefoura~~

Mission 4= Evil Dude

Room

3-3-2000

To describe my bed to you, I was going for as many tables as possible. The bed isn’t very big, so I sleep cuddled up. There is a table opposite to the pillows, but it’s a pull-up table. The place under the bed is another work station; the bed is also a pull-up. I’m also planning to install a rotating table in the center.

It’s a really small space; I can stand in it, but with my hand outstretched, I can reach the ceiling. Otherwise, it’s the size of an average bathroom—kind of small, but it still works. I gave Nefoura the room next to mine; it’s a first-come, first-served rule. The other two rooms are narrower.

I need to do some modifications in the engine room, so I guess that’s all for today. It’s been a while since I did this.

K.J. out

4-3-2000

Okay, so after we both settled in, this morning, I told Nefoura to meet me in the main hall. I wanted to talk about the evil dude and her opinion on his help.

“Hmm, I don’t know much, except they blame him for everything bad that happens in the Rare Lands, even accidents. You also mentioned needing a thief, what about that?”

‘And that, ladies and gentlemen, was the moment Kios Jaden knew (dramatic pause) he had the answer.’

I reread the part where I was in Dayyan from my diary just to be sure. And there it was—the little thief, the blonde kid. He might not listen, but he might if the offer pleases him. I’m going to ask Nefoura to see what she thinks. Now I’m just confused: should we recruit the little thief first or the evil guy? I’ll ask Nefoura for her otherworldly knowledge. (Oh my god, I’m relying on a 9-year-old for advice).

5-3-1999

Nefoura says we should ask the little thief first, since he might be a lot of help in freeing the evil dude. Okay, I better make a checklist again.

~~Mission 1=Cantas~~

~~Mission 2=Cantas ship~~

~~Mission 3=Nefoura~~

Mission 4=Blondie

Mission 5=Evil guy

Talking about today is going to be boring. My life these days is pretty dull. Compared to the first month here, I'm doing great. We got Cantas' ship out—did I mention that? I think I did. Anyway, now we're heading to Dayyan. Thing is, this is going to be a long journey.

Since we both don't want to leave the ship and go by land—actually, we don't have to; the ship has wheels—so by land it is. It will be a shorter journey by land.

Nefoura says we might not survive the heat, but then again, she is a daddy's princess. It also might be because she's 9, but I used to wash bathrooms at 9. Still, I'm going to give it another thought, though.

6-3-2000

Okay, I thought about it overnight, and here's what I think:
Going by land isn't exactly what it sounds like. The dessert is actually quite small, and one part near the wall is really narrow. Plus, it's not all desert, so if we get bored of surroundings, there's the sea around. It's a smaller route, and we won't run out of supplies. The wall will also guide us so we won't get lost.

By sea, however, is exactly the opposite.

We are going to go through the shorter route. Why? Because it’s better. Who’s going to convince Nefoura to take a little heat? The fact that I'm captain and it’s my ship—you do as captain says.

7-3-2000

Nefoura got convinced faster than I thought; maybe she’s not a complete a daddy’s princess after all.

Okay, I’m going to seal this diary so it doesn’t cause binding problems later. We’re heading off to Dayyan.

5

15-3-2000

So I bought a diary as fast as I could, well I didn’t buy one I just bought all the stuff, made the cover and bind it all together. I'm going to keep track in this until all the members are recruited. Then I'm going to pack all 3 in a crate for safe keeping, and use that crate as a table (I need more tables!). That’s the plan.

However right now, we are in a desert. My ship is moving toward the wall. From an angle we can see the sea on both sides. It’s a little distant but you can still see it.

Nefoura is sleeping. She spends most of her time either sleeping or sharpening her knife. Man she has a knife collection and it is so cool. Now I want a knife collection.

16-3-2000

We did some brainstorming on what to say and how to find our little pickpocket. Unfortunately, Nefoura was fresh out of brains, while mine are occupied with emotions and homesickness (anyone would argue that the heart does that but scientifically the heart only pumps blood while the brain processes and creates emotions). I was wondering what’s on the other side.

Maybe it’s a bunch of nothingness, since we can’t see where the wall ends in height, blackness. Or maybe its heaven, I doubt I’ll end up in heaven seeing as what I did is ethically wrong. Maybe you die the second the gates open. Could be that it opens to the Bermuda Triangle; we could end up in yet another maze of a world, another Rare Lands; maybe a parallel universe. I have no idea.

Our best chance is to open the gates. I might go home or a lot worse things could happen, worse than even death maybe. I've got a wicked imagination, I better stop.

Of course I would be stupid in telling Nefoura all this. She’d just get worried and paranoid. She might withdraw and accept the Rare Lands. No one knows she’s the murderer; she could change her name and live a peaceful life in the Rare Lands. But no, she’s as determined as I am. I’d be doing this place a favor by taking her home.

17-3-2000

We kept making mock conversations and scenarios about what to say when we meet Blondie. Finally, Nefoura fell asleep on the couch, and I started recalling what Blondie looked like. I took out my diary and here I am.

God, Nefoura looks like a baby when she sleeps. No, not a baby, but a doll. Cute. Sometimes she gets really moody, and I’m reminded of how young she is, only 9. I bet her parents must be worried sick about her. Where did their daughter suddenly go to? What would she tell them? The truth? And what would I tell mine? Everyone saw her vanish, a large crowd, but no one saw me vanish.

My mom and dad would think I ran away or got kidnapped. Neither of our lives would be back to normal. ‘Impossible’ suddenly seems to say ‘I am (m) possible.’ What would they say after seeing me, after so long? It’s been almost 1 year. I’ll be 13 soon. Things have changed; my way of thinking has changed, and my innocence is gone.

I'm going to stick to my original plan: think of the present, deal with the present, and make the right decisions in the present. If one thinks too much of the future, they’ll never know what’s going on around them. Be present in the present and subconsciously prepare yourself for the future.

It’s like you wake up one day and say, “I’m going to drive on this road”. You keep driving, but if you think too much about the destination and not focus on the road, you might crash the car and never make it there. You’ll know where you’ll arrive when you choose the road; once your goal is set, focus on the task at hand.

I have this theory, because I get kind of depressed and worried when I think of the future. I know I’m leaving, so I'm leaving. What happens next is something I’ll fret over when the time comes.

18-3-2000

In all those life lessons, I forgot to mention, we made it out of the dessert. I thought there was something wrong with the engine, so I spent, and am going to spend the rest of my day in the engine room. I ate and drank, but the engine needs fixing, so bye.

19-3-2000

I feel like an adult, like someone who’s responsible, for the first time. I mean, sure, my parents left me home alone all the time, but taking care of yourself does not count. I, for the first time in my life, feel like an older brother. Right now, I’m sitting in Nefoura’s room, in her bed, with her head in my lap, stroking her hair. She’s sleeping, and because she gave me strict orders not to leave her alone until she woke up, and because I remembered she’s 9 and still a little child, I followed her order and took out my diary.

I made her talk in an attempt to calm her down, and she told me why her eyes are purple; apparently, everyone in the galaxy of Nefoura has eye colors like blue, purple, and pitch black. The shades vary, but the colors don’t go to brown, green, grey, or any other color we might find normal. She fell asleep while telling me about how everyone from Nefoura has hair the color of light, hence glowing sliver.

She tries to hide behind the mask of a serial killer, but she’s still 9. I feel like she’ll grow up until we leave, become mature, but I don’t want that for her. I had all the luxuries when I was her age. Every child deserves to be pampered and loved, at least until they reach 13, become a teenager.

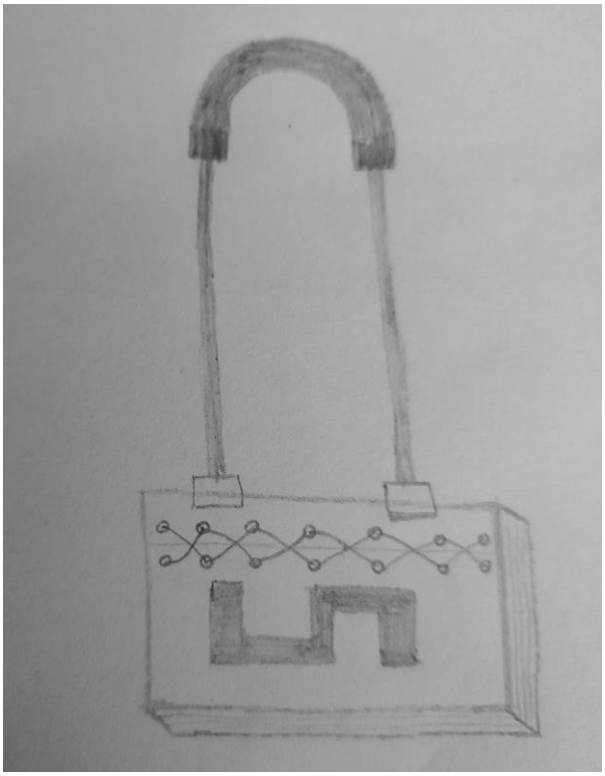
Looking at Nefoura now, I feel responsible for her. I want to give her a normal childhood, as normal as I can afford. I’m not going to let her worry about what would happen later or what to do now. She’s going to relax, enjoy her life, and fulfill her duty to me.

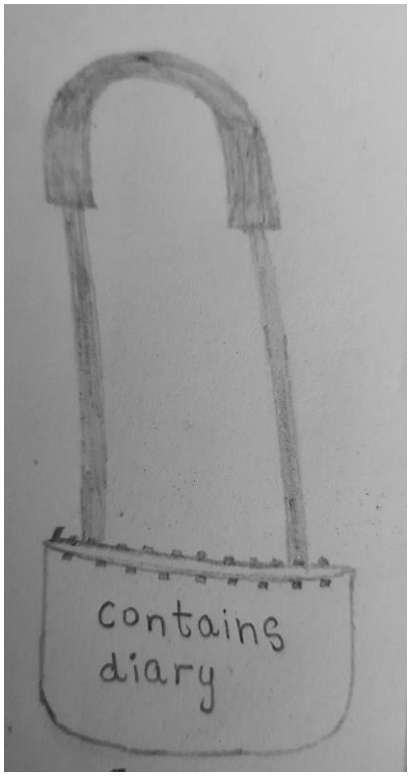
I promise you this: I’m not going to let you worry about anything as long as I’m here.

20-3-2000

After yesterday’s storm, I spent all day reassuring Nefoura that everything was fine, it was just a storm, just lightning, nothing more. Later, I stroked her hair to calm her down, stayed by her side until she fell asleep, and woke her up for dinner. After dinner, we went to sleep (a ‘finally’ for me and a ‘no’ for her).

Nefoura had cleaned of the main lounge. She didn’t wake me up until 6p.m. “You needed sleep, but we’ve got to plan a plan”. She was right because we had reached Dayyan. I didn’t think we should go out today. We’d start looking tomorrow and we’d work on a plan then too because right now, I’ve got other things to do. I need to make a strap book holder for my diary, sort of like a bag.





These are only rough sketches; the final result will be better.

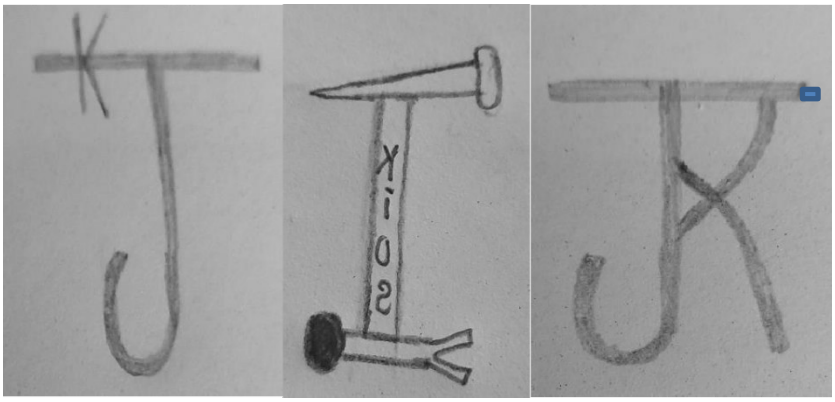
I’ll ask Nefoura but I think we should wait two weeks and try to blend into town. We can ask around about Blondie and try to attract his attention. I’m not sure, but I think it’s worth consideration.

21-3-2000

So, to make a strap and everything, I need to know how big the diary is going to be. It’s already bound, but now that I’ve written a few pages, I feel like the trip to Yamnimca might not fit in.

Also, I considered the first idea for the holder; it’s too risky and exposed, could get lost or damaged. I'm going to do the second one. I’ve got all the supplies, now it’s time to learn to sew.

Oh, I have this epic idea of adding a TM to my inventions or, well, anything I build. So, here are some designs. I thought of one, but then Nefoura suggested more, so now I'm confused.



Okay, I suck at drawing. Trust me, they looked good in my head. The way they look is just a reflection of my drawing skills, and the blood I use.

Honestly, all the previous pages are now brown because of the rotten color of dried blood. It’s bright red when I write, and give it two days and Bam! It becomes an ugly brown. Though I’d prefer black over any color.

Now, to make a stamp for the inventions and documents (you’d think I work for a multinational company). I think I could go with design number 3. Ugh, two weeks and so much to do.

For spreading rumors, I'm going to send Nefoura. She blends well in a crowd and can subtly slip information into others’ ears without arousing suspicion.

22-3-2000

So I told Nefoura her job, and like the lazy couch potato that she has become, she asked me why I couldn’t do it myself. I told her 1. I was busy making stamps, bags, and dealing with the ship, and 2. She better contribute in some way to the cause.

Anyways, she asked about my bag, and I had to tell her. And explain the whole thing because she just DOES NOT LET GO until she finds out what the deal is (see, perfect for investigations). And of course, she had a request. “KJ, could you make me something that could hold my defense gear?” I wanted to say no right then and there, but I thought it would be rude, and she might be unwilling to do what I asked.

Nefoura has a lot of defense gear:

1=Pepper spray (to blind people).

2=Small pocket knife (to stab in close distance).

3=Sleeve knife (to use in emergencies while tied up).

4=Shoe blades (again, if she, I don’t know, runs out blades or needs a surprise blade) (“surprise! I have a knife in my shoes) keeps them in a special pocket in her long boots.

5=Rocks picked off the road (for throwing).

6=Bow string (to give a slow painful death) (that counts as offense though).

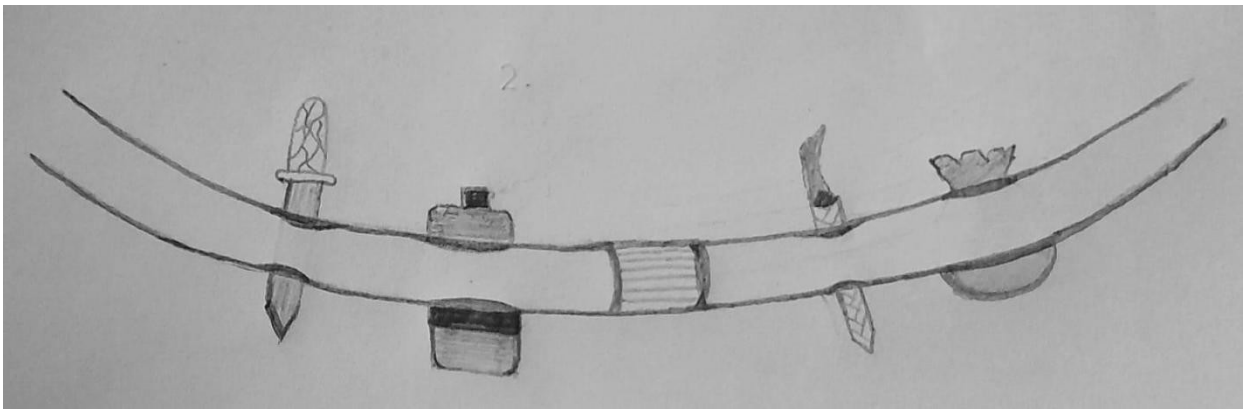
7=Birthday cake knife (to murder people) (offense).

8=Deathly glare (I don’t know if it works on others or if it’s lost its charm but it can’t work on me).

9=Icy touch (I saw stick her fingers in ice the other day, then she touched my nice and warm neck with them, on an average mine are colder) (I've been told the warmer one’s touch, the more they are loyal; I guess it’s true).

10=a special tone that makes Rare Landers scared (not me, I’ve seen her baby side, it doesn’t work once you have, instead it make you think “cute”).

I’m thinking of not making her a bag but a belt. She’d need to rummage through a bag, and it would also limit direction and movement of reflexes as well as speed. A belt would decrease those factors. Something like this:



It could be easily hidden within her cloak. I think it’s perfect. Now I just have to make it. Ugh, It is 1:00 am and I feel like going zzzz.

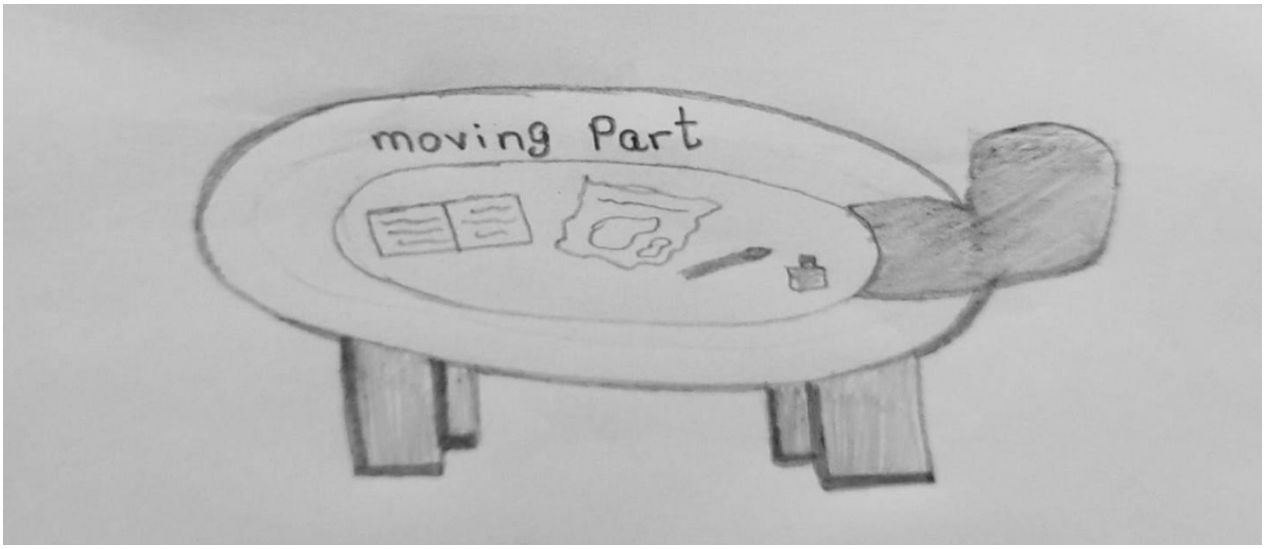
K.J. out

23-3-2000

Tiring life, I couldn’t even work properly. I had to get up every single time just to get an itsy-bitsy thing. I'm going to think about this. I'm thinking maybe I should make a rotating table or chair. The chair would help me get all over the room; the table… would not. And I've

already installed drawers to the table and few other things. It might not work as I've planned, so I guess I'm going to stick to the chair.

Considering between a chair and a stool; chair will help with good posture, however, I'll have to be hunched over on a stool.



I imagined my room with a rotating chair and then a stool. The size of my room is tiny, so the chair would make it cramped. Also, I might not be able to turn every side, limiting my reach. So good posture just went out the window, but then isn't every great artist hunched…? I don't think that's true. Stool it is.

24-3-2000

So I'm making the stool wheel. All other projects put aside. Oh, and I asked Nefoura about her progress, but she asked about the belt, and then I shut up. That's about all that's happened, other than the fact that I slept all day.

Man, I had such crazy dream. I was standing in a white room, and then there was a drop on my finger, a black stain. I tried to wipe it off, but it fell and slowly turned the whole room black. Then it changed to my usual nightmare of flying ponies in a candy forest.
After that, there were the crows with red eyes that turned my nightmare into a dream about Mom and Dad fighting skeletons while I was getting pecked by crows. I have those two almost frequently with some changes.

25-3-2000

I'm so tired today that I can’t even write. Just

26-3-2000

So I woke up and my room was a mess, stuff here, bits there. I was even having trouble walking but being lazy, I didn’t clean up. I did take the linen shirt; Nefoura bought me last week, from the pile of whatnot on my bed.

Why I had a change of clothes? Because surprisingly, my old shirt doesn’t fit anymore; it’s too short. I made it work all this time, washing it when I took a bath and let it dry while I slept. I had to change my pants because they grew short too quickly.

I looked at my new shirt and got a little sad (I know, I know, I’m very soppy). I haven’t had a fresh shirt for almost a year. Nope! Positive thoughts only. I'm going to buy the whole store of shirts. Actually no, I'm too lazy and poor to do that

After that, I completed work on the stool; it’s cool, works. I should complete Nefoura’s belt soon or she might decide I'm better off dead, and honestly, I don’t like the odds there.

And look at that, I was going to write how my day went, but nope, that’s it.

27-3-2000

Ooh! I have news. So I completed Nefoura’s belt, and she called it something out a fairy tale (I guess Nefoura’s galaxy has fairy tales). Then she went out on her everyday search, as I decided to try cooking (I overcooked her steak and undercooked mine). I'm not writing about that.

Later, when she came back, she made me sit in the lounge and told me, “I found something”.

“What?”

“He’s something years old and sort of does everything in the main market street.”

“That’s it?”

“That’s it.”

“He’s alone?”

“Yeah, he works alone; those other kids were just random kids playing”.

I looked at Nefoura; she was blinking fiercely, and her lips pressed. I should have comforted her, told her she would get to play again, but we needed to discuss this, and I thought I had a plan taking shape.

“So he’s a thief?” I noted.

She nodded.

“He’s after our pockets and steals anything worth it?” I continued.

“Duh, that’s how thieves work”.

“So there’s no other thief but him?” I raised my eyebrow.

“Yes,” she narrowed her eyes. “What are you getting at?”

“What if we put a note in a wallet, with a message on it offering what I offered you or something of the sort?” I raised both my eyebrows in anticipation.

“But we wouldn’t know what he wants”.

“True. How about telling him where to meet us—“

“He’d think it’s a trap”.

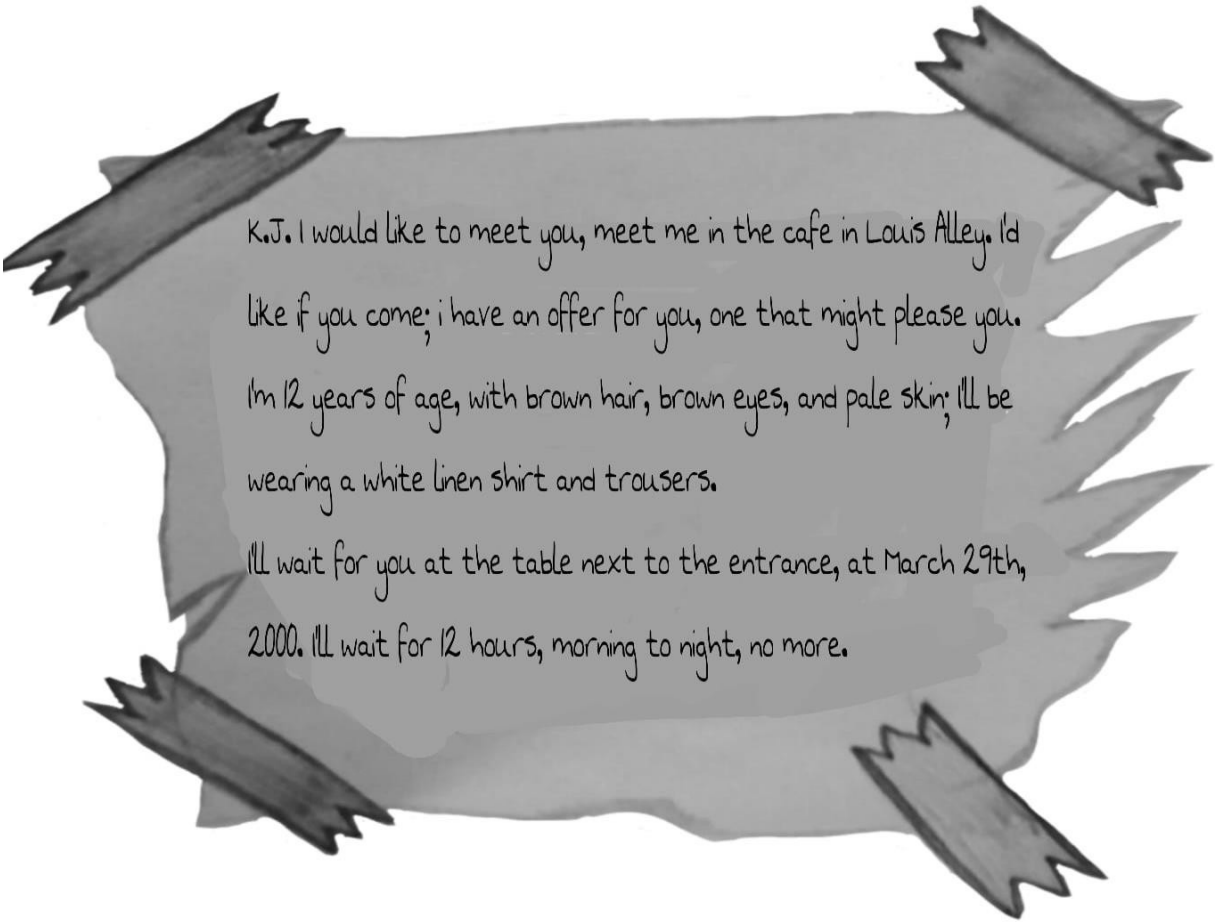
“What about telling him there’s something in it for him?”. Nefoura just shrugged.

I didn’t assume that he was just a kid, that he wouldn’t be so smart. Nefoura and I are kids too, if only a little older, and we would think about this with the same mindset as any adult would, because no one in the Rare Lands is ordinary, they just get brainwashed later.

But one thing was certain: he was a thief, and thieves are almost always gamblers. By finding more information in the letter about us, he would see us a safe target. That’s the way every criminal’s mind works, I figured I could use that. This plan is not all that different from last time’s recruiting, if not safer.

It’s his territory, he could get out fast. I would have to choose a crowded meeting place. Once he finds us, I’ll talk to him because, like I said, thieves are gamblers, and in a gamble, you need to give something from your side too, which in this case will be his time and the risk of getting caught.

I explained my plan to Nefoura without telling her all this. Like I said, I don’t want her to worry, and perhaps because this also applies to her. I wrote a note; I’d put it in here if I ever get it back from him.


K.J. I would like to meet you, meet me in the cafe in Louis Alley. I'd like if you come; i have an offer for you, one that might please you. I'm 12 years of age, with brown hair, brown eyes, and pale skin; I'll be wearing a white linen shirt and trousers.
I'll wait for you at the table next to the entrance, at March 29th, 2000. I'll wait for 12 hours, morning to night, no more.

28-3-2000

Oh, it’s been so long since I left the ship or my room for that matter. I, for some reason, prefer artificial stuff over nature, so I didn’t really miss not going out.

I feel awfully lazy. What is wrong me? I have to go to the market with the note. I could send Nefoura, but she sucks at convincing. It goes from ‘will you do it?’ to ‘do it or I'm chopping your fingers off.’ I know because I've been in that situation.

So I have to do it myself.

I had breakfast, got dressed and decent. Then I got bored and started looking at stuff in Cantas’ notes and blueprints. There are a lot of automations; this guy really was a genius. I wonder why I’ve never heard of him on Earth, considering he was from Earth. I mean, he was on Newton’s level. I only checked out the automation blueprints and a couple others.

There was a box with the word ‘PERSONAL’ on it; the contents of the box are still there, waiting to be revealed. I got panicked about where Cantas went, if he left or not, what was outside, and in order to calm down, started writing.

29-3-2000

So I have to say, he was smart. The dude went like, “I’ll think about it”. I mean, I was expecting it but still, wow. Okay, backing up:

I was just having a stroll in the market, making it very obvious that I had a wallet on me; then a swish of blonde hair and giggles. I felt for my wallet—gone. I smiled to myself; phase 1 was complete. Now it was time for phase 2.

I waited in a café. If the kid wanted to find me, he would. Oh my god, I had to wait for so long before he finally did. Here’s what happened:

A blonde kid, about 6, came to my table, grinning. Not even looking a little bit like a thief; hands in pockets.

“Hey pal,” he said casually, sitting in the chair opposite mine.

“I’m not your pal.” I wanted it sound serious, but I sounded more sleepy than serious.

“Sure, anyway, I read your note. Smart, by the way. I mean, the way you put it in the wallet, I liked it. But honestly, your threatening abilities are zero, nada”.

“I wasn’t threatening you; I was making an offer”.

“Yeah, whatever,” he rolled his eyes, and I got awfully irritated.

“How old are you?” I think I looked extra sleepy with the way I was sitting: leaning back, legs crossed, and cheek resting on fist.

“That’s classified.” Good, finally, he was acting like a kid again. My smirk must have unsettled him because he dropped it.

“Okay, I'm getting serious, straight to business. How do you know I'm a pickpocket? How did you suspect me unless you don’t know the rules? But anyone who’s spent more than a week here knows the rules, and I've seen you here more than a week ago,” he raised an eyebrow, style.

“Now that we’re talking about our real interests, I’ll tell you mine and you’ll get your answers”.

He stayed silent, waiting. I intertwined my fingers.

“My name is Kios Jaden. I was 12 years old when it happened. My luxurious life whisked away with the sound of a bell, and I ended up here.

I hated it; I starved all day and slept under a cold roof at night, so naturally, I hated it. From the first day, I knew I wasn't built for the Rare Lands. Finally, I decided I'd had enough. However, my hope really sparked up when I found out about Cantas. Heard of him?"

"Who hasn't" I nodded.

"Do you have even the slightest idea of where he went"?

"Went missing, or rather died if you ask me," he smiled showing his teeth.

"And if you ask me," I leaned forward and with my fingers still intertwined, "he went out the gate", I whispered.

His eyes widened in disbelief. "That's impossible," he breathed.

"No, it isn't. There is way," I leaned back. "I need your help to follow Cantas out".

He thought for a moment then asked, "Is there anyone else helping you too?" One should read a contract's details before signing.

"Ever heard of the murder cases in Solter?"

He smiled again, the same smile. “Yeah”.

“The murderer is in on the plan too.” His eyes went wider, and his jaw dropped dramatically; there was a streak of giddy joy in his eyes.

After some time he got up and told me, “I’ll think about it.” He was about to leave when I asked, “And where will I hear your answer when you think about it?”

“I’ll find you when I want to”. “And

your name?”

He smirked “classified”.

I laughed as he left, sipping from the mug in front of me and immediately retched and coughed. When I asked the waitress what she served me, she replied, “Coffee, sir”. I put the mug down, shaking my head at my dislike for coffee, and left the café with my hands in my pockets and a bitter taste in my mouth.

When I went back to the ship, I told Nefoura of her fan boy. She acted nonchalant, but I saw the pride in her expression.

You know what, I want fanboys and fangirls too; Nefoura’s got Mr. Pickpocket, old evil dude’s got Nefoura, Cantas’ got the whole Rare Lands, Newton’s got a whole planet, and Leonardo Dicaprio’s got a whole bunch of boys who want to have their hair cut like him, including me. So it’s kind of unfair that I’m an evil, murderer, inventor, actor, but I don’t have a single fan. . Pity

Nah, I don’t really care. Fans are headaches, I've heard, who cares? Also, I might not classify as evil yet, just an afterthought, no?

30-3-2000

It’s the last day of March, or maybe it’s not. Is it or is it not? I need to do the knuckle calendar calculation, nope March has 31 days, and it’s the second last day of March.

I just had breakfast, then I lay in bed. I was about to write ‘laid’, but then my mental grammar corrector kicked in, and I remembered that the hen ‘laid’ eggs. It’s funny how I still remember that stuff.

After that, I went to the engine room to breathe in real, peaceful air and have some me time. I thi~~n~~

3pm-30-3-2000

I am so tired of babysitting. I’m literally gritting my teeth right now.

Nefoura acts all grown up, but the girl sees one spider—just one spider—and Bam! She starts freaking out.

I was just chilling, writing in my diary when I heard a scream. I ran straight out the door toward her, imagining all sorts of scenarios. Thanks to my impression of little-miss-knife-not-a-dagger and my imagination, I was freaking out. What could have happened that it had made Nefoura (emphasis on Nefoura) scream?

“What’s wrong?” I burst into the lounge.

“That thing is creepy,” she squeaked.

“It……is just a spider”.

“It’s freaking me out, oh my, it’s got legs! AH”.

“Of course it’s got legs, it’s a spider. Haven’t you seen a spider before?”

“Such creatures do not exist on Nefoura”.

I snickered. In my defense, I thought she meant her name.

“Nefoura, my Galaxy” she replied, pouting.

“Are you serious? You were named after your Galaxy?” Imagine being named Milky Way, wow, that would suck.

“Don’t act like you didn’t know that, or have you forgotten?”

“I might have.”

“It’s only been three months. Anyway, anyone outside of Nefoura must call a Nefourian Nefoura. If you’re not from my area, you will call me by my area’s name. My neighbors have to call me Dimel because that’s our house’s name, but my real name is Othrera. Only my family can call me that.
I told you before, Nefourian names are complicated”.

I kind of get it, but I kind of don’t get it.

I’m going to put this away safely, have lunch, and then take a nap, I guess. Let’s see if the kid shows up today.

31-3-2000

Now, it definitely is the last day of March.
Glad that’s out of the way.

So, yesterday, after lunch, I went to my room for a nap. I was in dreamland, dreaming of my jelly house that I only can see in dreams, even if I want it in real life; there’s only so much one can have in life.

Anyway I was having a wonderful nap when I was woken up by my lovely-not-so-lovely shipmate Nefoura. The only reason I woke up was because she threw a glass of water in my face and immediately after, yelled in my ear.

I usually do not wakeup easily, unless you spray water in my face. My parents used to do that since I started going to school; otherwise, I wake up on my own. Even if someone drums in my ear, I won’t wake up. Take away my blanket, I don’t care; shake me a lot, pull my hair, I don’t feel a thing.

I only wake up with water, which sucks in winters during school time, or used to anyway. I remember when I was 3, before I started school; my parents tried teaching me how to take a bath under the shower on my own. I guess it was terrifying or something, but now I kind of have a little unconscious phobia. It doesn’t affect me when I'm conscious, but I still take a bath in a tub; not that I'm allowed that luxury anymore.

Considering the state I was in when I woke up, that had been her last option. My feet were wet, my blanket on the floor, and there was a pan and spoon on the table.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Stop yelling. I came to wake you up because,” she switched to her fancy manner, doing this thing with her hands, “the person of interest has arrived.”

I blinked for a second, my brain still groggy from sleep. I frowned, holding my tongue between my teeth as I do when thinking; then the past half of the day came back, and it clicked.

“Oh, you mean the thief, Blondie. He’s here already? Isn’t it too early?”

“KJ, it is 8 p.m.” hands on hips, Nefoura looked like a first grade proctor.

“I guess I overslept. Where is he? Let’s go”.

“Firstly, yes; secondly, in the main room; and thirdly, you should wear a shirt first and freshen up.”

“Hmm, yeah okay.” In my defense my parents used to wake me!

Once I was up and ready, I went to meet Blondie.

He was sitting in a chair, fidgeting with his hands. I realized how awful hosts we had been; no tea had been offered, not that we had any. I hadn’t even offered to order him tea in the café; the waitress had just served me something after I told her to, before he arrived, to seem busy. I have to be one the worst host of history. Then again, who cares? Do I? I do not.

He looked up and grinned, “Hi”.

“Hey, I'm guessing you wanted to find me, presumably with an answer”.

“Yeah, but I have a question too”.

“Ask away”.

“What’s in it for me? You said in your message there was something in it for me, but you never said anything in the café”.

I blinked; he hadn’t thought of that yet?

“We all escape the lands, isn’t that what we all want?”

“How do you know we can?” Wow, that’s what I've been trying not to ask myself. “Cantas left, right? Have you seen him back on Earth?” Had I not asked myself that one day?

“I wasn’t alive a hundred years ago”.

“Basically, you have no idea, or no real proof that we can get out”.

“Kid, its physics and I know physics”.

“This is magic and we don’t know magic!”

“We can still try”.

“What if we come out into a volcano and die?”

“You can’t defy death; it’s going to come when it’s going to come”.

“Something worse could happen too”.

“Why are you thinking so negatively?”

“Why do you sound so bored?” he exclaimed, getting up.

“What??”

“He usually sounds like that, even if he’s highly interested,” Nefoura interjected.

He looked at Nefoura with pressed lips, then said, “Look, all I’m saying is—“

“Just tell me, are you in or are you out?” Cutting someone’s sentence in the middle gives you more power and authority, like ‘hey, I cut you off mid-sentence and you can’t do a thing about it’.

“So I can’t even ask a question?”

“When you say a question, that grammatically means singular question, not plural” (I know, I know, I'm good at grammar) (bow).

He seemed unsure, and I was getting frustrated. Okay, sure, I was the one in need, but in my defense, I think sometimes that I am the boss, and that part of me got hurt when he looked at Nefoura and asked, “Are you in on this too?”

“Yeah, I mean there is a chance at escape, right?” Nefoura was on my side. What had he expected, a ‘surprise, I'm only standing here because I'm getting paid for it’?

He pressed his lips, then nodded at me. “I’ll take your offer if I get a place to live and food to eat”.

I looked at Nefoura and smirked before leading him away. “Right this way, Your Majesty”.

I took him to the two empty rooms. “You can bring your stuff and put it in either of these two”.

“That won’t be necessary. I don’t have any stuff” he said after jumping on the bed a few times, I smiled. I mean, he was a kid.

Oh my god! His name! I forgot to ask. I feel like he would’ve told me now if I asked. I am such an idiot.

He gives me the vibe of Theodore from Alvin and the Chipmunks, which is adorable. I'm going to call him Chipmunk until he tells me his name.

There’s only one room left, Evil Guy’s. It’s like this ship was made for us. I'm wondering what we should call ourselves. Well that’s for after he agrees.

UPDATE:

Chipmunk shared some classified information: “I'm 7 years old”.

1-4-2000

I want to do a count down like every year, but there’s actually stuff to write, so counting down along with ~~normal life~~—never am I ever calling this normal. No, no way.

I found out that Chipmunk doesn’t really have a name. I pity him; the Rare Landers are evil, and that’s it. He said that he came to the Rare Lands as a baby, so no one ever named him, and everyone just called him kid.

He has a photo with a note written behind that that tells him where his parents are: Canberra city, Australia. I don’t know why there was a picture or a note, but good thing there was. Anyway, Australia is the other side of the world, far away from DC, so I can’t go to visit him or anything (thank God though; I don’t plan on keeping ties to this place).

The only reason he wants to go back is to find his parents. I told him to go to the police station, show them the photo of the woman, and for conformation, do a DNA test, and voilà; you will be back at home. Of course, all that will happen after we leave.

I know he can do it because, unlike me he’s an extrovert. Most of the tasks that introverts see as a big deal and overthinkers find torturous are just a ‘no biggie’ for extroverts. Being an overthinker is torture; there’s only one solution to overthinking: no thinking. That’s why I try not to think about how my parents will react when they see me again.

28 days to go.

2-4-2000

These past two days, I’ve been very free. Food is brought back by Chipmunk. Nefoura thinks she’s quite older than our 7-year-old, even if it’s only a 2 year age gap; she’s 3 or 4 years younger than me. So, Nefoura thinks she has a younger one to take care of, hence she no longer cries, and I don’t have to reassure her.

My whole day is spent in the engine room, manning the ship. It’s obvious we’re no longer staying in Dayyan. I know my destination: Yamnimca. All left to do now is free the Yamnician prisoner, and convince him to join our ‘noble cause’.

Oh, looks like someone’s coming, probably to call me for dinner. I don’t want my diary read, so I’ll put it away. Oh almost forgot:

27 days to go.

3-4-2000

This is the last update of this diary. I've only got this page left. I know I said I'll write about the events of Yamnimca, but I don't have any space left. I'll start a 6 diary after some time; I need to do some figuring out first, like how to put this thing on auto pilot.

6

16-6-2000

Kios Jaden. Diary 6

It’s June. I delve into the details of the past 2 months. The summary: sailing across the sea, researching the Yamnician palace; no secret entrance found, so I’ll have to bluff my way in.

Other than that I went through Cantas’ stuff. Found numerous projects I’m eager to explore. Theo and Nefoura have become close friends. Nefoura’s birthday passed a week back, she’s 10 now. Theo informed me that he’ll be 8 in August.

I didn’t really know if we should celebrate, seeing as how it could be a sore spot for her. Anyway, we got a cake (Theo stole one), and I got her a gift, roller boots. All I did was put roller skates’ wheels under her regular boots. It needed some work but it turned out great; she loved them. I taught her how to skate, think she’ll get the hang of it at some point.

Theo got her a new cloak and a silver hairpin. She’s letting her hair grow longer, as well as learning different braiding styles. The cloaks length is longer than the last one, seems like the shortness of it wasn’t style. She looks a death angel now.

Theo got this idea that if he calls me ‘boss’, I would become very cool, and he’s also trying to convince me that I am ‘very cool’. If you ask me, I don’t care much about ‘cool’.

Anyway, I’m in my room, writing after 2 months. I finally got the time to write to sort my diaries; old ones in a case and new one covered and bound. I didn’t care much for the cover this time. It’s obvious it’s a 6 written.

Nefoura’s outside learning how to skate; she’s starting to get it. Theo’s probably cheering her on, actually, it’s awfully quite so maybe he’s dozed off.

That’s it for today.

Been a while, no?

K.J. out

17-6-2000

We have arrived.
Yamnimca has a coast. I told Nefoura to stay on the ship and guard it. Even if ‘there is no evil’, and I don’t believe that, I don’t want

anyone snooping around my ship. Theo's staying with her because I don't want anyone finding their wallets missing either.

I'm going to the city, to find more info. Theo told me I was very cunning after I told them why I was going. They always go on and on about how cool we are; seriously, what is it with the cool thing???

Anyway, heading out.

K.J. out

18-6-2000

I guess I couldn't find out anything useful. Not that cunning then.

I managed to get a guy to tell me how long the prisoner's been here: 10 years. Might be my age, at least it's not a child. The merchant managed to tell me that he's in for some kind of crime; something about loyalties. So the person was obviously consciously thinking.

One develops conscious thought and sense of right and wrong at the minimum age of 10. So, I'm guessing he's at least 20. He couldn't be younger if he's a genuine loyalty shifter. Or maybe I'm wrong, and these crazy people have imprisoned a kid younger than 10 for something trivial or an innocent mistake because they're psychos.

Now, for the plan; I need to form a plan. This time, once I've formulated it, I'm going to have to tell the other two because I might need their help.

K.J. out

19-6-2000

A plan. Right. So, I know that ORL can sense when someone does something wrong, or has done. It’s supposed to be really strong, but the Solter king didn’t have a clue about Nefoura’s whereabouts, let alone her identity. I’m guessing this works like a sense. If you don’t use it for a long while, you forget how it works. That theory depends on luck; and I don’t like that, but what can I do?

However, there’s a 60% chance my theory is correct, based Solter’s king’s example and the science behind senses. But there’s still a 40% chance that it’s incorrect, and a 10% chance out of that 40 that I might escape if I try. I’ll need to keep extra 5 escape plans.

So, the plan:
We go to Yamnimca palace. Nefoura and Theo will find a way inside—not my problem. I, on the other hand, am going in as a kid who has a problem. I'm going to be someone with a cure for Appordex (a disease in the Rare Lands that can be fatal, it’s rare but it scares them!) They’ll definitely hear me out.

I’ll give a long speech, which will be a distraction. Meanwhile, I trust in Theo’s abilities to steal the keys, and in Nefoura’s abilities to kill her way through and guard Theo and later me and the prisoner. Then, we leave through the way Nefoura and Theo came.

There is an advantage in this both ways: if he agrees, then good; if not, then he’d be a bad guy, the government would want him caught, and no one would notice us looking for the pieces because all the chaos is happening because of a prisoner on the loose.

I've come to an agreement: I’m going to treat everything in this journey as an obstacle, and I am one who prefers to remove his obstacles rather solve them.

K.J. out

20-6-2000

I told Nefoura and Theo the plan. Nefoura said she could crack a window open, and Theo told me he can sneak in easily. See, I didn’t need to worry about them; I knew they could do it.

I had to do my laundry without a washing machine. You know what? I'm going to go through Cantas’ blueprints see if he built a washing machine. I don’t think so; he was from a long ago. I wonder if I can find information about him in old newspapers, though I doubt it since the writing on everything isn’t exactly English.

21-6-2000

I have a perfect speech at the ready.

“Your Majesty.”

bow

“I am very pleased to be in your royal court, highly honored”

(Question)

“Your Majesty, I am a servant of your court, and today this servant has presented himself at your court for one reason and one reason alone”

Side Note: at this point, I’ll know if my theory is correct without revealing my intentions since I'm lying.

(Question)

“Your Grace, this servant of yours has come to please you with something of your great royal interest. If you give the permission to begin”

(Permission granted)

Side Note: at this point, Nefoura and Theo would’ve entered.

“Your Majesty, before I start, I would like to thank you for allowing this servant of yours, who means nothing in this world and would like to serve your royal highness and spent his whole life at your royalty’s feet.

I would like to thank God for giving your Majesty age and health. I would like to thank God for letting me exist so that I can serve your Majesty for the rest of my days”.

(Whatever they say)

“Your Majesty, I, your loyal servant, was sitting in a tree near a bush in a garden near a hut that looked a thousand year old, full of spiders and webs of the spiders leave as proof of their existence; magnificent creatures if your Majesty may question what I, your royal highness’ servant, may think. Beautiful, wonderful, fascinating little creatures with tiny legs. Truly, I am a man in awe of why mankind can live in fear of such sacred magical beings”.

Side Note: I know I'm dragging it; I'm doing that on purpose. I don’t really have a cure. I think Nefoura will be there to rescue me before the king gets really impatient. If she doesn’t, then:

“I was sitting in an ancient tree. Here I was, enjoying my apple when I saw, your highness, I saw; the beauty of nature. I saw trees, gardens, animals, magical spiders, walnuts, apples….”

(I’ll rattle on).

“I looked at the city and saw the city’s walls, buildings,”

(Going to rattle on)

“I realized that the city was small, your Majesty, the city was small, the people more. The palace is large and the people fewer. The reason your highness has been protected from this evil disease is that your Majesty lives in the palace”.

bow

Side Note: I’ll probably be killed if say that, so either Nefoura’ll get me out or I’ll get killed for my honesty. Hopefully, they won’t attack Nefoura when she has a minister by the throat.

22-6-2000

I've practiced my speech with Theo, and I am very confident I can do this. Just got to work on my accent; I'm going for the kind that’s used to flatter a king in movies by some measly advisor.

Not like the ones in Disney movies—not that I even like Disney princess movies. Don’t even get me started on the dumb songs. Anyway, just wanted to update on how it’s going. We’ll do it when I'm ready. Theo and Nefoura are practicing breaking into houses (not sure if they’re actually doing it or if it’s just mockery).

Right so that’s it.

K.J. out

23-6-2000

I’m not in a mood. Actually, I’m in a big mood, so bye.

26-6-2000

I got around the mood block. I get them, but it’s been long since I had the last one. I usually just feel like the door to my brain got locked. I haven’t looked in the mirror and properly examined myself. I need to do that first. Bye (I said that in a cute voice).

27-6-2000

It’s like I jinxed myself. I looked at my beautiful face in the mirror, into my hazel brown eyes, and they somehow got hurt. I wish I had blue eyes; I could describe them like the sea or the sky. Or green eyes like Theo’s, then I could call them a forest like people do in books, ‘Her\His eyes were like a whole forest’ or ‘I found myself getting lost in the oceans in his\her eyes’.

I know people talk about other people that way, people that they love or whatever, gross. I feel like that about myself, which is absolutely possible. I can only fall in love with three people in my life…… I, me, and myself.

Now I'm talking about people, not things or fictional characters. Like tech, probably my 5th love in life. The first is probably my blue stuffed dinosaur; Bubbles. I got him when I was 7, at a fare. I couldn’t sleep without him since, part of why I couldn’t sleep in the start of the Rare Lands time. And…….

I have been summoned; probably little-miss-knife-not-a-dagger or the local chipmunk hurt themselves while practicing break-in or escape. I might continue my love story tomorrow, I said might.

K.J. out

28-6-2000

Yup, I was right; Theo sprained his ankle. I might not have mentioned it, but I was kind of planning the prisoner escape on the 1st of July or something. But because Theo’s ankle needs to heal, we might have to wait. Hopefully, it won’t take long.

Once I sprained my ankle while running from a dog when I was six. I didn’t stop running and walking, and eventually, it healed in a week. God, I am scared big-time of animals—any kind: crows, dogs, cats, lions, mice, bees, you name it. Only later did I find out that the more you run from dogs, the more they chase you. You should walk away or simply stand still.

What else? Oh yeah, I've got to take a bath.

K.J. out

29-6-2000

Have I mentioned my fever?

I might be getting Appordex or it might just be a cold. I know it’s just an intense cold, but still, I don’t think I want to be allergic to fruits. Fruits are like chocolates here, not taste-wise but value-wise. Speaking of chocolates, I haven’t had one in like, what, a year. The last time I had chocolate was before I came here, right before going to my mom’s clinic. God, I used to have a chocolate almost every day: good days.

30-6-2000

I think I shed a few visible tears. I do cry a lot, but I haven’t really been seen crying.

I was crying in my room, on my bed after a failed attempt at sleep. Crying because what was I, and what have I become. Put my dad’s name in front of mine and BAM! I had half of DC’s favor. Other than the fact that I went to a public school, I had everything: a house, a credit card, a bunch of gadgets, I had every luxury. I mean, I used to be rich. And what had, the ungrateful boy I used to be wanted?

Attention; friends, family and attention, all useless in the end.

But this is the last time I'll ever cry. I won't have the world laugh at me or pity me. A leader doesn't get pitied, especially not by his followers. I hate pity; I've seen it on so many faces, so many times: after the fight with Mark, after getting punched by that bully, after the teachers used to ask why my parents didn't come to the parent-teacher meeting, after the Rare Landers saw me starving.

I hate pity. It always comes after something I hate, after I lose control of my world. And I swear I will never, never lose control over my life again, never.

My path is set, my goal dangling in front of me. If it requires time, I'll wait patiently until the day I achieve it arrives. If there is any obstacle in my path, I will remove it. Whether I have to break bone, shred flesh, or shed blood, I will do anything I need in order to follow my path emerge victorious.

I will not allow myself be pitied. However, those who pity me will be pitied themselves; I will make sure of that. This is a matter of my ego, and there is nothing more important than that, is there?

1-7-2000

July has arrived.

Theo’s ankle’s fine now. No problems so far, other than one: we could’ve done it all today, but Theo informed me quite late in the day. However, I think we might need to postpone this a few days later considering how I still need to work on my ‘Majesty’s’. I want it to be perfect; we can’t have ourselves killed now, can we?

K.J. out

2-7-2000

I'm nervous. What if my speech is seen through and the king kills me? I don’t want to die. Maybe I’m trusting Nefoura’s ability a little too much. Maybe she can’t help me out, and I’ll die there. How will they execute me if they sense I'm lying? I think they might cut my head off or worse, put me in a prison.

5-7-2000

It happened like this:
I was shaking from nerves; I knew I couldn’t pull it off. Hopefully Theo and Nefoura would do their part right. Theo brought me clothes; I was going to dress up as a peasant boy. Nefoura messed up my appearance; my hair became oily, sticky, and ugly. I put mud on my face and under my nails. I looked worse than I ever had.

Nefoura’s skates made her look taller; she almost reached my shoulder, almost.

I practiced all day until we had to go. It was a hearing day. The king was going to hear everyone’s problems today. That was why, after I found out that the whole first week of each month is hearing day, I decided we would go in then.

We left the ship at the docks. We made for the palace separately. Theo was going through the crowds, Nefoura through the rooftops, while I was going to go in through the main gate. Deep breaths—even those couldn’t keep me calm, and I wasn’t even the one breaking into the castle or leading a prisoner escape. Actually, I was leading the escape.

I made my way to the head guard hoping against hope that he would be as dumb as the guards at Solter.

“Hello, great sir. Sorry to bother you, but I cannot wait in these tedious lines for I have knowledge precious to his royal highness.” At least my accent worked.

“I’m sorry child, but you have to wait in line,” he thought I was only a child, nice.

“Such knowledge cannot wait”.

“What knowledge do you have, young boy?” Exactly what I wanted you to ask, I thought, mentally smiling.

“I have a cure for…… Appordex” I said with dramatic effect, widening my eyes and acted all misty-eyed.

He reacted exactly as I’d hoped; yes, they were as dumb as the guards of Solter; his eyes widened and his mouth fell open.

“Take this young man straight to the king, hurry lad, hurry,” he ordered the guard at the front of the line, and off we went.

The whole journey was a blur. I can hardly remember what it looked like. Between the rush, my own anxiety, and the V.I.P treatment, all I saw was the never-ending red carpet, and the stone brick walls of the dimly lighted, old fashioned castle. My heart was practically jumping by the time we reached the throne room doors.

My thoughts wandered to Nefoura and Theo. They would’ve entered by now, given the low security and high trust levels of the palace. All I needed to do was stall the king.

The grand oak doors swung open. The guard who had escorted me must’ve briefed the other at the door about my purpose, because he regarded me with sudden respect.

Leaning over, he asked, “Your name, sir?” Surprised and with my mouth drying up, I had not thought about that. In a panic, all I could manage was “Kios Jaden,” which came out as a squeak.

He relayed my name to the trumpeter, who announced my arrival. The trumpet sounded, and then “Keeos Jaden.” I mentally smacked my forehead; he had gotten my name wrong.

After that, my practiced speech began and I zoned out. Before I got to the part where I insulted the king, the oak doors flew open, revealing a grinning figure panting in the doorway.

I grinned back at her; Nefoura looked like she’d been through a blood bath, which she probably had. She jerked her head sideways, ‘Are you coming?’ it meant. I started running. It took 2 minutes for the king and the guards to get over their shock after I reached Nefoura.

I wasted no time looking at the three bodies by the door. Nefoura shut the door and we kept running. I followed her since I didn’t know the way out.

The guards were yelling behind us, apparently calling my name, but not quite.

“Chaos Jaden”

Nefoura looked at me sideways with an amused smile and a raised eyebrow.

“Who got the name wrong?”

“The trumpet guy,” I mock-whined, and Nefoura chuckled.

“Glad I killed him then?”

“Very.”

I saw the bodies of guards several times just as I had expected.

The king’s guards didn’t reach us, and whenever one would get close enough, Nefoura would throw a blade their way, and, THUMP it would find a home in some guard’s guts. Nefoura rarely missed, and her belt was stocked with ninja stars, small blades, and throwing knives.

We had to be at least five floors up now. The only room we entered was a kitchen, or more specifically, an abandoned kitchen; there were no bodies in sight. I looked at her.

“Why did we stop?”

She made her way toward the small window.

“Because we need to jump.”

“You’re crazy.”

“I’m not.”

“We’re five floors up.”

“Theo’s five floors down.”

I was shaking my head, no.

“Trust me, KJ, you’re not going to break your legs or die”.

“You go first.”

“I would, but I'm afraid our friends, the guards, will find us soon and you don’t know how to throw a decent knife”.

Right on cue, we heard someone trying to break in. Nefoura tilted her head.

If I was going to die, I'd rather have someone to blame for it. I made my way to the window and sat facing the other side; I closed my eyes and jumped.

Death felt like floating, like I was floating in nothingness. There was something soft; the ground was soft. I thought, 'this must be heaven considering all the comfort'.

"Hey boss, you can look, you know," I heard Theo's voice.

I was alive? And it didn't hurt, so my body wasn't broken either. I opened my eyes and saw that I was slowly landing toward the ground, sitting on top of a…… flying carpet? Oh, so I had been floating but not dead.

Once I landed, I looked at Theo, smiled, and shook my head. I was about to ask about the carpet when I heard an unfamiliar voice, older.

"Well you're a real coward." How dare anyone judge me. "And

you are?" I asked, turning toward the sound.

He could have been 16 years old max, with long, straight, black hair that reached his shoulders and shinning dark blue eyes. He was wearing rags, and his arms were bare, showing his muscles, but he was thin, not skinny, but thin. His lips were almost red; my mom told me mine should have been like that, but they look like the lips of dead due to dehydration. He had light brown skin and round eyes, and he was smiling.

He was about to answer my question when we heard Nefoura yell from above.

“You hoo, you can do intros later, how about get me down first?” I heard a guard yell behind her, a THUMP from the knife finding home, and a louder THUMP after the body hit the floor. She had turned away now, facing the guards. A few more yells and ‘THUMP’s and then she jumped.

Instantly, our new friends hands shot up as did the carpet I had stepped off. He made a few hand gestures, and the carpet flew under Nefoura, safely landing her.

“Even if the guards are dead, I still think we should get moving. I don’t have any more knives, and the king’s still alive” Nefoura was right; we had to get to the ship.

“Who knows the way back?” I asked, and Theo’s hand shot up. “Then lead on, Theo,” I commanded like a leader would. We started walking, but as soon as people saw Nefoura’s bloody form, they started murmuring; then we were running.

I asked him again, “Your name is?” He looked at me from ahead

“Huh?” And then it clicked.

I snapped my fingers. “Evil Guy!” and he burst out laughing. I looked at him but didn’t say anything.

The kings guards seemed to have reached the townspeople because I heard my nickname shouted in all directions, “Chaos!” or rather my new title. Evil Guy looked at me

“Your name’s more evil than mine, Mr. Chaos”. This time it was my turn to laugh.

The people seemed to be afraid of us, because we reached the ship fine. We had to get away from Yamnimca and off to sea, so we did.

I spent the past two days in the engine room.

I didn’t even show Evil Guy around the ship or ask his name. In fact, I came out today; it’s nearly 11 p.m. This is about the only time I'm going to write this down, and I know it; I'm going to go crash into my bed.

K.J. out

6-7-2000

Kigel; he finally told me. His name is Kigel.

I went to the bathroom early in the morning and coming out, hit my head against the bed, so due to the headache I couldn’t go back to sleep. When I got out of my room, I heard Nefoura and Theo playing upstairs. They got up early for no apparent reason. I had woken up 3 hours earlier than I wanted to.

Breakfast had already been served because he was already at the table eating butter on bread; the only breakfast we had had since the Yamnimca episode; someone really needed to learn how to cook, someone who wasn’t me.

“Morning Evil Guy” I mumbled.

“Morning Mr. Chaos” He seemed cheerful, why anyone would be cheerful at 10 in the morning was beyond me.

“Don’t call me that”.

“Then… what should I call you?” he raised his eyebrows.

“Kios Jaden, call me Kios Jaden Mr. Evil Guy”.

He gave me a look of mock offense. “Don’t call me that” he mimicked my sleepy voice, I smiled.

“So...your name is?”

“Kigel, my name is Kigel”.

“Kigel? What a funny name”.

“Actually Mr. Chaos, I'm not of your world. In my world it’s a very common name”.

“Still,” I smirked at him.

“Oh please, you’re one to make fun of people; three minutes ago you looked like a grumpy grandmother”.

“I’ll take that as an offense”.

“Please. Do” he tilted his head from side to side with each word, smiling all the while. His joyfulness was starting to make my head hurt; who could smile so fully at that ungodly hour?

The rest of breakfast was spent sending mock glares and narrowing eyes at each other. I got commented on after I glared at him for calling me ‘Mr. Chaos’ for the 100th time.

“You’ve perfected a glare”.

“Huh?”

“Your glare,” he pointed his finger at me, “is scary”, he said, widening his eyes for dramatic effects.

I left the breakfast table feeling very proud indeed.

K.J. out

7-7-2000

They act like I'm dumb or something.

Yesterday, Nefoura and Theo came after sundown. I was in my room, and Kigel was in the lounge; he rarely went to his room until dinner. For dinner, though, we were all together, and Nefoura goes like, “So… KJ, did you talk to him?” She could’ve been talking about a dozen things; how was I supposed to know?

“About what?” I asked. Nefoura sighed, and Theo rolled his eyes, smirking.

“Boss, what did you talk to us about when we first met? it definitely wasn’t intro’s; you didn’t know my name until two days later,” he said.

“Hey, I named you!” I said looking up at him.

Kigel glanced at me with a confused expression.

“You’re getting off-track.” Honestly, Theo could bring you right back on track if he wanted to.

“Right, yeah, no, we didn’t talk about intros,” I admitted. I had completely forgotten to talk about that. Oops…

Nefoura shook her head in disbelief.

“You always forget to mention something: my time, you forgot to tell me your name; Theo’s time, you forgot to ask him his name; and now you forgot about that” she remarked.

I opened my mouth to say something, I couldn’t come up with a good reason other than ‘I’m human, okay?’ when Kigel interrupted with, “What is that?” Thank you so much for the help, Kigel.

“I’ll tell you tomorrow,” I said, managing to evade further criticism from the junior crew.

I still haven’t told him, and it’s close to midnight. I spent all day as a plumber, fixing the pipes in the bathroom. I’m super sleepy now.

K. J. out

8-7-2000

I need to talk to him, but I'm so tired that I’d rather not. I really don’t want to.

1:30 pm

I checked everything and nothing needs fixing. I'm going to try and cook again; God be merciful to the food.

It’s not like I don’t want to explain it to him; it’s just that I don’t want to repeat something I've already done twice before. It’s the same speech, and I'm starting to think I've learned it by heart.

K.J. out

9-7-2000

Kigel cornered me last night. I was just chilling in my room, doing nothing, and he walks in and sits right next to me, and goes:

“So… what is that?” I groaned and faced him.

“So, I have to do this, huh?”

“You should tell me,” he insisted. I thought about how to present it to him; I had some questions to ask first.

“How does your magic work?” I inquired. He looked at me with disappointment.

“I can give magic to any object, but only some specific objects and a few types of magic,” he explained, like making a carpet fly. I had a lot of questions; in my defense, I had never seen real magic before.

“So, where you’re from, everyone have magic there?”

“Not like mine. In the cube, people use these sticks from the trees of magic and make potions, sort of like chemicals for cures and whatever. But magic like mine is a talent, while everyone else has to learn it as a skill. It’s also very rare to have magic like mine. Do you get it?”

“Yeah, I think I do,” I didn’t.

“So, are you going to tell me what that is?” Not yet.

“Why do you trust us?”

“You helped me get out.” He has the mindset of a child.

“We killed all the guards”.

“You have your faults” he replied shrugging.

“Are we better than the Rare Landers?”

“To me, you helped me get out, so maybe,” he shrugged again.

“Do you hate the Rare Landers?”

“Hate is a strong word.”

“But do you?”

“I hate… their views,” something in his eyes twisted.

“A man’s views define him.”

“I guess I do hate them,” he wasn’t looking at me anymore but at the table in the center. I could see the hatred in his eyes, excellent.

“Do you want to leave?”

“Impossible” he said, shaking his head.

“The word itself says I am possible, plus I have a plan.”

“No one can leave the Rare Lands,” he spoke in denial.

“Imagine I had a plan but needed your help. Would you help?”

“Is that why you helped me escape?” he asked. I smiled.

“Remember one thing, Kigel, whatever I do, there’s always something in it for me.”

“That’s selfish.”

“Practical,” I corrected him. He stared at me, and I told him he could leave my room if he was going to sit there and judge me. He got up and left; the guts to be honest. Before he closed the door, I told him to think about it.

I have a fever today; I haven’t left my room all day or spoken with anyone.

K.J. sick, so

K.J out

10-7-2000

1 diary; full of dates, addresses, calculations, no personal information about him; I found his address, lived in Russia. He was born on January 5, 1888. I figured the bit about the Russia because of a map given in it. Thank god my geography still works. The region of Russia was highlighted.

I saw a personal diary too but it’s written in a different language; I figured it’s Russian though I’m not good with languages. I’ll maybe ask someone to translate it for me. Cantas is my Hero, I'm going to keep his journal, decode it and read it. I feel like ~~ma~~

12-7-2000

I was treated by Kigel after I hit my head on the table. I fainted because of the fever. I've never feinted before, though. It was weird, like I started getting dizzy. I mean, it was like the world was spinning and there was a buzzing sound in my eyes. One minute I was like ‘I feel like I'm dizzy,’ and the next I woke up in a bed that wasn’t mine.

I wouldn’t have recognized it if it wasn’t for the fact that my bed couldn’t be that clean. Kigel was sitting on the floor, soaking a white cloth in a cup of water. I felt something cold on my forehead. I must’ve made a sound because Kigel looked up.

“You’re awake.”

“What day, date, and time is it?” I need to know, or else I get into a panic overthinking it.

“That’s a lot of questions,” Kigel laughed.

“Yes, now answer me.” He acts like I'm 3 years old and not 3 years younger.

“It’s 11 July. I asked Nefoura the time 5 minutes ago, so it’s probably 8 in the morning.”

“What happened?”

“You feinted due to a constant high fever, and then hit your head on a table, princess.”

Why did he add that? To indicate my weakness? If you ask me, there have been many strong princesses too; that’s no way to call someone weak.

“And you’re in Theo’s room. He’s sleeping in your room. Honestly, how do you sleep in that mess? Only Theo could fit in that little space we cleared on the bed. We didn’t want to move any of the papers, books, maps, or pens; and we couldn’t move the machines or tools because of how heavy they were. That’s why we put your pile of blankets, laundry, and greasy rags on the floor…”

Kigel continued talking, but I hardly cared for how my room looked as long as I could do what I wanted in it. He was talking randomly, but I but I didn’t care about what they had for lunch or how he showed Nefoura a new braid style; I wanted to get his answer to move forward in my plan.

“Did you make up your mind?” I asked him, sitting up.

“About?”

“What we talked about before I feinted.”

“Oh… that” I started laughing and coughing; we called the ‘I have a plan to escape but need your help’ conversation that; it was almost an abbreviation.

“Yes, that,” I said mid-laugh, then stopped, realizing this could be serious for Kigel.

“Sorry, go on.”

“Yes”

“To what? That you hate it here or you want to help or you think I'm practical and not selfish”.

“To everything.”

“Good, great, I can believe it!”

“Aren’t you going to ask why I'm agreeing?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t care.” Kigel was giving me a look I chose to ignore.

“Quick, get me my diary; it’ll be on the bed. It’s got a big 6 on the cover.” I don’t trust anyone with my diary, but I know Kigel can’t read it anyway; we all might magically understand each other’s languages, but writing is another thing.

“Oh no, Mr. Chaos, you’re not going anywhere until tomorrow.”

“No! I need to write”

“Go to sleep.” He got up and switched the lights off.

“I need to write,” I whined in a baby voice.

“Sleep.” Kigel magically threw a pillow at my face. So unfair how he can use magic but I can’t. He left, closing the door behind him.

Later though, I did sleep because there’s so much one can do to get rid of a cough. In the morning, I sneaked into my room, but Theo was sleeping in there, so I settled for more sleep. I was allowed back to my own room after dinner.

13-7-2000

I realized:

~~Mission1. Finding a way out~~

~~Mission2. Cantas’ Ship~~

~~Mission3. Recruit all the members~~

Mission4. Find all pieces of the Pendulum

Mission5. Make the Pendulum

Reward: back in the past life.

Mission 4 begins today. It’s time to have a good look at the map with the clock pieces marked on it and head toward the first one.

14-7-2000

Glovern, our first stop; I've narrowed it down to the second market street. The first one is where I used to work. Wow, it’s only been a year and a half yet if feels like forever. I've manned the ship to face Govern, though I haven’t told the others.

Anyway, I need to get back to work because there is no auto pilot in the ship, which means it’s almost stopped now. From the engine room;

K.J. out

15-7-2000

It’s only a day’s journey left. I’m in my TM messy room. It’s going to be midnight in one minute. All day Kigel kept pushing me to eat more, Theo kept on annoying me with ‘can I press this?’ and ‘what does that button do?’ As of where Nefoura was, probably in her room; she hates the smell of fuel and gas as much as I love it. Oh, it’s mid night.

16-7-2000

Continuing:

So yeah, I'm super tired but it was definitely worth it. I worked all day and finally got the ship to stay on autopilot. We'll definitely reach Glovern tomorrow.

It's not going to be hard; we'll convince them to give it to us, whether by talking or threatening. It isn't human nature to kill, but if the person needed to be killed, I'll kill them because like I said, every obstacle in this path that stops me will be removed, whether that is a life or humanity. I've got nothing to lose and a lot to gain so…why not?

17-7-2000

Alright, I admit, I might've been a tad bit rude, but he was talking back too. And anyway, I told him we only needed the screw from the wall, but oh no, he had to make scene.

And I am very sensitive about my name, but the Rare Landers seem to think calling me a nickname is not going to make me mad. How dare anyone call me ‘Chaos’. It was time to show them who was in charge, so that’s what I did. And anyways, I didn’t start calling myself that silly little title. If you’re going to call me Chaos, I’ll show you I can become Chaos.

Kigel knew exactly what he was signing up for. I'm actually nice; I gave the sucker time to move out. He can move back in whenever he wants; all I want to do is break down a wall, is that so wrong?

That’s all that happened; Kigel’s unhappy, let him be. I'm not going to apologize. If he’s got mercy getting in the way, well that’s, his problem to solve. I didn’t tell him we were going to do this the ‘peaceful way’.

Talk my foot. I tried to talk, but did the idiot listen?

If Kigel thinks I'm going to apologize, he’s wrong. I've got an ego and it’s bigger than his size. The other two didn’t have a problem with what I told them to do in the Yamnician palace or now for that matter; they just followed orders. I didn’t even ask him to do anything; all I asked was stand there with your arms crossed and smile.

He’ll realize what these people are after I dump him here, but no, I'm a good guy, I won’t do things like that. I'm furious; I could’ve gotten that screw today, 200 pieces and if Kigel keeps doing this, then we won’t be able to get 2, let alone 200. I'm going to knock some sense into him, but only because his magic is useful.

K.J. out

18-7-2000

See, he didn’t utter a word and it worked fine.

I went to the man. I asked, he refused. I raised my eyebrow, he shook his head. I simply told Nefoura to deal with it; a few slashes of her blade, some blood, and everyone backed away. Theo got a bit richer during the ordeal. I made Kigel magic something to break down the wall.

Once I took the screw from the ruin, I walked back to my ship. A few people tried to follow, but Nefoura would eagerly show them her knife-throwing skills, and soon no one blocked our path or followed.

I ignored the constant yells of ‘Chaos’ and continued walk. Like I said, I’ll remove every obstacle from my path, whether by hook or by crook.

19-7-2000

I plan on collecting the entire main body pieces first, so whether in Solter, or Dayyan, or Yamnimca, I’m headed there. It’s funny how I intend to write a lot of things but end up writing just one chapter of this life.

This is the last page of my 6th diary. I mean, 3 was about the beginning, 4 was about Nefoura (the pun), 5 was for Theo, 6 was for Kigel. If you ask me, I liked the simple life of 1 and 2; Of course, that’s what I'm aiming for. Theses chapters were the preface; the real story, that’s only just begun.

K.J. out

*****

Kios Jaden's story did not continue the same; it turned more and more gruesome. As Maryam continue reading onwards, the narrator of her summer-time fiction novels continued to turn colder, and Maryam became convinced that these diaries were nothing but unpublished novels from a villain's perspective, for that's what her summer-holiday-novel's hero had become.

Maryam grew with Kios Jaden. Two summers had passed; Maryam was 15 and now, so was the boy in the diaries. Maryam was nearly through the 11th diary when the day arrived on which Kios Jaden silently turned 15.

29-4-2002

It was great, or as great as it could be these days; everything is so boring. Anyway, Kigel did the thing where he magic’s a pen and paper to write everything we do until Kigel dismisses it, again. He’s going to translate it so I can write it in my diary because he insists. Also this is going to be from the pen’s POV because I promised Kigel I wouldn’t comment or cut anything; because he promised the pen has described kindly us this time.

***

Kigel is standing in the center of the shop, grinning, while Theo’s giving him his betting price. They bet again, this time on the man’s age.

The man—Kios didn’t bother with his name—is being pinned to the wall of the tiny shop by Nefoura, both to keep the door shut, and to have her knife at his throat.

Kios is bent over a piece of paper with a pen in hand; he’s trying to calculate the exact location of the bottle of oil they’re here for. The bottle of oil is the last thing they need to make the pendulum.

Kigel bets the man is close to 50, while Theo bets he is close to 60; the closer either's guess is to the correct answer, the higher the other has to pay betting price—that is their game. They turn to the man.

"Oi, how old are you?" Theo asks.

"I'll tell you nothing," replies the man.

Nefoura tightens her grip on the man's arm, where she's holding it against the door.

"You're going to tell us anything we want," she hisses.

"No!" the man spats at her face.

The eleven-year-old has quite a temper. She takes her hand off the man's arm, removes one of her smaller blades at her belt, and drives it into the man's arm. He shouts out in pain as Nefoura sneers and the other two watch with some amusement.

The man is still screaming when they hear a loud THUD; everyone goes silent. 'THUD'—the sound was made when Kios brought down his hand on the table on which he leaning over.

Silence settles over the room as Kios looks up. He’s barely audible, but it’s enough: “Silence,” he says.

Nefoura pins the man and his bloody arm harder against the door, while Theo and Kigel give him dirty looks. They think it’s his fault that they can’t talk; if he hadn’t screamed like that, Kios would never have gotten angry, and no one wanted to anger Kios.

The boy might not know it, but a single glare from him sent chills up your spine; it promised a bad fate if you got on the wrong side of the line.

After quite some time in silence, Kios looked up, satisfied. “I'm done,” he said. They spent the rest of the while watching the shovels dig; Kigel has magicked the shovels to do the digging. Kios leans against a wall, where the digging isn’t happening, head resting against the wall, with his arms folded, and eyes closed. Theo keeps poking the man’s stomach while Nefoura grins at him like a victor, knife still at his throat.

Time passes much the same, until Kigel’s tools find something besides mud and rock: a bottle of oil. Kigel holds it up to Kios, grinning.

“Found it,” he exclaims.

Kios snaps out of his daze and faintly smiles. “Wonderful”. Kios takes the bottle from him and looks at it in wonder, then moves towards the door. Nefoura drags the man out of his way.

“Alright, we’re done,” he says, going out.

“What do we do with this one?” Kigel asks, jabbing his thumb at the man.

“He bothered us too much, so whatever you like,” Kios replies without looking back.

“Aye aye, captain,” Nefoura says gleefully, exercising her neck. Kios is now waiting outside in his usual, bored manner.

Nefoura is about to make a movement when Kigel raises his hand. “Wait, we’ve got a bet pending,” he faces Theo, grinning.

“Oh yeah,” Theo smacks his forehead. “I forgot”.

“Afraid you’re going to lose?”

“Definitely not.”

“Well then,” Kigel gestures to the man and Theo asks, “Oi, how old are you?”

The man seems to have realized his end is inevitable, better to go with lesser wounds, because he answers. “Ff-fifty th-three.” Theo turns to Kigel as he scowls at the man. “You sure looked older”. They both leave the room as Theo hands over a gold chain he stole to Kigel as betting price.

Nefoura looks at the man, sneering wickedly. “Been a while since I last did this,” she says as she slits his throat.

After wiping her knife on his cheek and retrieving her blade from his arm, she too exits the tiny shop.

***

30-4-2002

It’s now time for my (sort of) hibernation. With all the pieces collected, I’ll finally construct the pendulum. I can see its bob dangling like my victory over the Rare Lands. Soon I will defy all the laws of this hell posed as heaven.

However, to do that, I must first build my key. Before starting, I must be in a decent condition, for I will inly eat, sleep, work, and repeat.

I’m going to get my hair cut in the style I always do them ever since titanic came out; the DiCaprio cut. Then take a bath, wear new clothes, clean my room, etc. I won’t be able to write in my diary until the pendulum is complete, so yeah, that’s it for now.

K.J. out

29-5-2000

My name is Kios Jaden. 3 years ago, I came into the Rare Lands. At that time, I was scared, lonely, and uncomfortable. I swore to find my way back to the life I was snatched away from.

The journey of the past three years has been stored in my diaries. No matter how much I hated the Rare Lands in the beginning, I have to say, and I started enjoying it here at some point.

No one wants to become the villain, but when you want something, and you know you can get but all that’s blocking your path is your humanity, well, you have to remove it like any other obstacle.

Tomorrow, a lot of people will die, the original Rare Landers, because after a century, the gate of the Rare Lands will open for a second time.

I might regret it, what I would do tomorrow, in the future, but at the moment, I regret nothing.

For the first time in my life, I will look back fondly at this time because of the company I kept, and not because of the place was at. I hate to admit it, but I'll miss them. I mean, Nefoura's like my younger sister, and Theo's like that one junior at the school who thinks he's your age and your best buddy, but all you can think of is how cute he looks when he brags.

And Kigel, he's like, not a big brother, but like, he's so childish it feels like we're the same age, even though he's like 18 and I'm like 15. In America, you get your license at 18; I bet if Kigel sat behind the wheel, he'd cover his eyes with his hands while pressing the accelerator instead of the brakes. Wow, I really needed to imagine that.

Right now, I've got to go pack my diaries, Canats' blueprints, and diary. I would love to take a bath, but let's see. So yeah; got to go; bye (cute voice).

K.J. out

30-5-2000

Oh my god, I just thought, what if I forget them? Here's what they look like:

Nefoura:
She has silvery blonde, waist length hair; usually tied in two French braids. She has dark purple eyes. She's about my height when I was 13, 5 feet. She's going to turn 12 in a few days. Her cloak is the same classic style she always has had; actually, all of her outfit is absolutely the same. Her belt is always fully stocked and by her side. [No joke; I suck at this :p)

Theo:
He has forest green eyes and dusty blonde hair, literally and figuratively, like his hair is always dirty. He's about 10 or 9 or something in between years old; he's like 4 feet tall. He usually wears a sleeves-got-torn-by-him white shirt and khaki shorts, and usually no shoes or beach slippers.

Kigel:

Kigel is the same, still the same long black hair; shinning midnight-blue eyes. He’s grown a few inches, but I’m a few inches taller than him; 5’8. He’s 18 years old. He wears a V-neck, sleeveless black sweater over an off-white shirt with maroon pants.

Oh, now they all want to do mine because I asked if Kigel’s pants are maroon or red, then he asked what I was doing and I told them, and then they said they want to do mine, so here we go, no cuttings; I've promised.

“Kios has the ugliest haircut (I feel attacked) and chocolate brown hair. He has dull brown eyes and pale skin, which you never see getting red; yeah, boss can’t blush no matter what. His lips are either cracked or chewed really badly.

He always wears a grey, oversized linen shirt and trousers with a hood that just covers half of his face, along with a grey mask plus scarf because ‘it’s always so cold or so polluted outside.’ His trousers are so long that they cover his ankles too, and under that, KJ wears these really cute white fluffy sheep-shaped slippers.

“There’s mostly a strap slung from shoulder to hip, supporting a bag in which he keeps a pen, ink (blood) pots, book, map, compass, dagger, his stamp, repair kit, and health kit; it’s awfully tiny, but somehow all that still fits. He’s usually holding a pen between his index and middle finger, where he flips it habitually. Oh and Kios’ fingers are always stained with ink (blood).

He rarely smiles if it’s not a smirk, where you can’t see the little dimples that show up on his face when he does smile. He laughs rarely, preferring to scoff, (honestly, I did not know). He doesn’t talk without a reason, except when he needs to order something or make fun of Kigel or tell Kigel to stop bullying Theo and me. He has a soft brotherly side we only get to meet when he’s in a good mood.

Oh and he’s an awful cook. I don’t understand what is so hard in cooking, like it’s just ‘add this’ and ‘let it cook,’ but Kios is a really bad cook (honestly, I've quit like I did with every other art-related thing, I guess I wasn’t born the artist.) What else?”

“Nothing else, stop spilling everything, half of it is not even true” “It

is!” Nefoura

Yeah, I just came back from a blame game of who's what. It's funny how I started it, but it got really heated when Nefoura and Kigel faced each other. Those two know how to 'bicker,' while I just state facts (which do not work during a fight), and Theo just either whines or mimics the opponent.

Kigel can rant on and on about the world's stupidest things, like colors, and he can even argue about it, while Nefoura shouts, so it usually looks like something big. But what they're currently fighting about is if you should drink 1 glass of water a day or a week. My answer is, you can live a month on a glass of water if you take it in four sips; however if you drink it all in 1 go, then you'll get thirsty in a week. I did that as an experiment and I know it works like that, though I did get kidney pain later, but I didn't die, so point proven.

How we said our goodbyes (going to write this like a play): 15 minutes more of the journey still left:

Kigel: "Kios, drop the diary."

Me: "No, I need to note this down."

Kigel: [Eye roll] "Whatever."

Me: "So Mr. Evil Guy, this is the end."

Kigel: “Yes; finally Mr. Chaos is going to be free.”

Me: “More like the Rare Lands is going to be free of Mr. Chaos.”

Kigel & Me: [Laughing]

Theo: [Enters]

Theo: [Hugs me] “I’m going to miss you guys.”

Me: “It’s going to be okay, you’ll be with your family.”

Theo: [Makes a sad face]

Nefoura: “I won’t miss any one of you on my birthday.”

Me: “Same, never gonna miss this place.” (I just remembered an old song: Never gonna give you up, Never gonna let you down, Never gonna something something, Never gonna remember lyrics)

Kigel: “Well I won’t miss any of you if you won’t miss me.”

Theo: “I’ll miss all of you, you’re my only family.”

[Everyone’s hugging?] (What to do? I'm not a hug person)

Me: [I pat Theo’s head and ruffle his] (I guess I should hug; everyone’s doing it.)

Me: [I hug Kigel]

Sir Kigel-Whines-a-lot: “Oh my god, do you need to write down that you hugged me, really?”

Me: [I hug Theo]

Kigel: “Seriously, Kios, stop”

Me: “Na-aa.”

Me: [I do a complex handshake with Nefoura]

Nefoura: “Okay, Kigel’s right, KJ, this is weird; are you noting down what I’m saying right now?”

Me: “Yup.”

Nefoura: “Okay, no one’s talking to KJ anymore”

Me: “How dare No-one!”

Nefoura: [Sticks out her tongue]

Nefoura: “Don’t do anything around KJ.”

Me: “I Glare at Nefoura” [I tell Nefoura]

Nefoura: [Rolls her eyes]

Me: [Laughs at her breaking her own rule]

Nefoura: “Okay, 1,2,3, shush.”

[5 seconds later]

Theo: “I think we’ve arrived.”

Me: “YES!”

Nefoura: “Theo!”

Theo: [Muttered] “Sorry”

Me: [Finger guns at Nefoura, who acts dead]
Honestly, that girl’s always good sport. Victory tastes sweet, whether it is one you get immediately or one you have waited for, for 2 years.

So yeah, bye. Rare Lands are behind me, my goal lies ahead. The pendulum is set right; now all I've got to do is pass through, and I am as sure as the sun is up that we will pass through. I have complete faith in my abilities and the power of science over magic.

This is it at last—this is the end of story of Chaos in the Rare Lands. It is time for ‘Chaos’ to become history and return to a life where I was invisible, insignificant, and inferior.

It’s time to go back; back to a life where people don’t hide when I say, “My name is Kios Jaden.” Instead, they scoff, “What a funny name” and dismiss it. Back to a world where K.J can’t be my initials anymore, but K.J.V.B.

I may not be respected in that world, that life, but respect can be earned. The cloak of insignificance can be removed, and a place can be earned in society. I choose that life because of the system of the world the attitude with which wrong is treated. But most of all, because I still have a long time to train, to learn from my mistakes, and to improve, unlike here where you run in the race of life the second you arrive.

Today I feel pure bliss because today, I WILL LEAVE.

Signing off,
Kios Jaden

Maryam continued reading the diaries even after Kios Jaden left the Rare Lands. It was interesting: how he faked amnesia, how he went to the police to report that he was lost, how he later laughed at the way he had fooled everyone, even how he was struggling with the system and attitude of the place he had broken all hell loose to come back to. He compared his former glory to his life then.

But Maryam found the diaries becoming monotonous. Kios Jaden slowly settled back into his life; however, now older, his routine was quite ordinary and dull. At some point, Kios Jaden stopped writing about how his day went, his personal life, and his opinions. Instead, it started consisting of paragraphs upon paragraphs of ideas, theories, and simple notes or numbers. Kios Jaden started writing his diary in codes.

He grew older, studied the profession of his choice, and started a life besides his parents and his school. He wrote of things Maryam had neither heard nor seen; she could not understand the written words on the pages despite knowing how to read.

At the end, Kios Jaden started making plans of moving out, leaving his childhood behind, trapped between words, stored away in the cupboard under the fake bottom. Then one day, he left. He didn't write it in his diaries, but then he didn't write anything in there anymore. Maryam realized he had left by the number of empty, white pages. The last diary, the 15th, had barely anything written on it except for the quote on the last page.

Maryam felt sadness one does after reading a really long series or story. The bitter feeling when one knows the journey is over but doesn't want it to end. She felt the longing for the words on the pages to move for her like the first time they did.

She put her summer-time getaway novels in stacks, the same way she had found them, and put them under the fake bottom so that someday, someone else could find them.

9 YEARS LATER….

22nd March, 2023

“Maryam,” Madison shakes her, “Mars, wakeup, take a little interest, will you?” She’s still shaking her.

“Hmm,” Maryam makes the sound in her sleep.

“Let her sleep, Maddie; she’s fasting,” Maryam mentally thanks Rachel for supporting her.

“What? Why?” Madison sounds confused.

“Maddie, she told us yesterday. Today is the first day of Ramadan,” Rachel remembers everything.

“Oh! Okay, I’ll let her sleep”

Peaceful silence at last; however, two minutes later, she hears Madison again.

“Maryam, Maryam, at least wipe your mouth. You’re drooling all over your hijab.” For some reason, Madison is whispering.

“Mmhmm,” she wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, which, of course, freaks Rachel out.

“Eww, Mars! Use a hanky next time”

“Shh! Rach, let her sleep.” Madison is still whispering.

“Sorry, you can go back to sleep.” Rachel is always apologizing. Sleeping is useless
anyway; you can’t sleep when resting their head on their hand, no matter how peaceful the seminar room may be. She raises her head and blinks a few times.

“It would’ve been so much better if I had gone to pick Dadi up from the airport; her flight would’ve arrived by now,” she whines.

“From Pakistan?” Rachel asks, and Maryam nods.

“What’s going on in the seminar?” Maryam asks. Madison seems fully consumed, but Rachel doesn’t seem to share her interest; then again, this seminar is for hardware programming students, Madison, and not software engineering students, Rachel and
herself. Madison forced them to attend, saying something about how they couldn’t spend enough time together after high school.

“Shh!” Madison puts a finger on her lips, facing them, eyes still on the stage.

Maryam sighs, and then settles her head back on her hand to take a nap. As a lullaby, she tries to listen to the lecturer; it seems to be the end of the lecture.

“My dear students, never quit, never stop, and continue to create. All your ideas are welcome; do not hesitate to create. Do not think whether it will be for good or for bad, because my teacher once told me:
‘No creation is right or wrong, neither is it made for the good nor the bad; the thing people inculpate the creation responsible for……’

“Is actually the intention with which it is used.” She opens her eyes, raising her head, finishing the quote, together with the lecturer, because she knows, she knows that quote. She had read it in a blank diary, on the last page.

It’s Maryam’s turn to shake Madison. ”Maddie, what did you say the lecturer’s name was again?”

Madison sounds pleased. “Professer K.J.V Benson”

Maryam’s mouth dries, and her eyes go wide as she stares at the man now leaving the stage.

Kios Jaden.

Author:

Here’s a short story about another Jaden, in another world. This short story was my first published work, so it holds sentimental value. I hope you all will love this Jaden just as much as the first (if you do). They both remind me of the each other… so… enjoy!

The World is Round

The conversation was becoming uncomfortable at too many levels, and I felt a threat to my little secret.

“I checked my pockets and my wallet was gone. Looked behind me and saw you walking the
other way. Again, what a funny coincidence, right?” he grinned at me. Inspector Palos had been throwing similar questions my way from about an hour.

“HA HA HA.” I hoped my laughter didn’t sound as fake as it was. Sitting there in the police station, in front of the officer, I felt quite uneasy about this. I decided it was time I left. “Okay, officer, I think I’ll take my leave. Good day to you. Alright, bye-bye.” I got up and made for the door, walking as fast as I dared.

Once I was out and running on my way to HQ, I muttered to myself, “Well Jaden you’ve got an officer on your tail.”

Three days later, I got up and went out on a morning stroll, keeping my eye out for snoopy policemen or some rich fella being careless about their wallet or jewels. I regretted these little *habits* of mine, but once you’re on the *Darkside,* you can’t do much.

Once I got back, I made my way through the building to my lovely room, a place that isn’t exactly pickpocket HOD standard, but then it is a small department. Lying on the bed was my summoning letter. I sighed, picked it up, and made my way all the way down to the head office.

Head of London operations, Miss Bling, was a beautiful woman who gave not-so-beautiful news to anyone being summoned. “Ma’am, you called?”

“Oh yes, I wanted to tell you that inspector Palos has been posted.”

“Excellent.” I sighed and grinned, my eyes searching her face for joy. There was none. “Isn’t that great news? I thought he had a theory about Darkside. His posting will allow us to operate without getting revealed.”

She was nodding. “Yes, but now Darkside is a known thing to the authorities, if not to the people. The new operative cannot be controlled”.

“Why?”

“No family, no friends, no burdens, no attachments, no records, educated, young, and to top it all off, went to police academy free of cost.”

I cursed. Those were all the problems of a dedicated officer. They couldn't be bribed, blackmailed, or brainwashed with dreams of a better future. Now Darkside might become public. "You've got useless people working for you," I told her.

"That reminds me, I have a task for a certain useless person." I rolled my eyes and listened.

My name is Jane Beracove. I am a trine police officer. Well… not anymore. From today, I am no longer an officer under supervision. From today, I will run the station at Sector A5 all on my own. The main project handed over to Sector A5 is a certain member from the criminal organization **Darkside**. Name and whereabouts of this member are well known; in fact, the previous officer even had one-on-one meeting with him.

"The problem isn't that we don't know him; it's that we can't prove it. This criminal works in crowds. He is well known by everyone. The boy has a part-time job at a café and goes to high school. But the thing is, this high school is run by Darkside, though the majority student body is normal. So we can't shut down the school down, and we can't ask why he disappears. The teachers always cover for him."

"But, sir, can't we get the secret forces involved?"

"No, because catching him is another issue. We try in public, and we get a bad image; we try in secret, and he runs out of some window".

That had been my conversation with Inspector Palos. Hopeless, Inspector wanted to come out clean and still capture him. Well, police did get involved in some dirty jobs. I was determined to catch him and get my promotion.

Excited, I whispered to myself, "You're going to do a great job and get that promotion." Talking to myself in second person was a habit I had gotten from my mom; sometimes old habits got hold of me.

I thought of this criminal Jay, or Black Jay. He was 17 years old. What could have turned him into a criminal at such a young age? And then I thought of my little brother. We were 10 years apart, so he would be 17 right now as well, going to high school and someday becoming an important man, independent too, just like me.

“Are we done yet?” I asked.

“Ugh, for the hundredth time, no. Wait, will ya”.

“Don’t boss me around, Ben the Beetle Head. I’m in charge here.”

We were in a small bank near the river, me and my best Beetle Head buddy, and Malcolm, who was waiting outside. It felt like hours since Ben had started to crack the lock to the safe. I had knocked all the guards unconscious. Meanwhile, Ben had deactivated the alarms and was trying to open a lock.

“Are we done yet?” I asked

again. “Oh, for God’s sake

—“

CLICK

“Yes, yes, we are done!”

“Good, ‘cause I didn’t want McDonalds closing, I *am*

hungry.” “Oh, please. It’s only 2 PM. McDonalds

won’t close this early.”

I was still narrowing my eyes at him when Malcolm came running in. “Police….. here…. know ‘bout…. us”. I listened but didn’t hear sirens.

“Well, wrap it up, boys. We’ve got a USB to find,” then muttered to myself, “Rich people are dumb, storing all the data in on device.”

After some time, we found the USB. We made for the door, which was now being blocked by the new police officer and her minions. “Hands Up,” she said, and I smiled.

“NO.”

Her eyes widened at my boldness. “Really?”

“You know, you guys seem to have finally gotten brain cells because now you’re actually smart. You know, turning off your awful sirens, finally understanding you need stealth for catching criminals. I’ve got to give it to you; your smarter than Palos”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, but I have to say this is not good for you, kiddo”

“Right back at ya, princess.” Out of the corner of my eye, I could see our

car, parked close to the window so we could escape clearly, and the window had been left open. So that’s the way we ran, jumped, and out the window we went.

I checked at our tires—fine—then the police cars parked some distance away. “You know, Mal, they are still pretty dumb. Haven’t learned the first rule of this game.” Malcolm raised an eyebrow. “How to slow your enemies down.” I took out my gun and shot their tires flat. Ben grinned.

Now we got going as I saw the police approaching and got in the driver’s seat. “First finish the job or McDonald’s?” I asked them.

“McDonald’s, I earned it,” came Ben’s voice.

Malcolm stared at me like I was crazy. It was the poor guy’s first time with me in charge, Ben was used to it.

“Alright, McDonald’s it is, though Ben, I am not paying for your order.” Ben groaned, as the police tried to fire behind us, but we were going 180 km/hr. I smiled; life was going according to the usual.

-

After several attempts, I finally figured out where he goes after getting the job done:
McDonald’s. Every single time he’s making plans of going there. God, how much does he spend on that McDonald’s? So I figured out how to trap him: we’ll set traps in all the McDonald’s in the area.

I stopped going after him some time ago. Being in charge didn’t mean running after every
criminal in sector. I was going through some files when the call came.
“Hello, Officer Beracove speaking,” I answered.

“Officer… I think we caught him.” That was Officer Dames, the one in charge of the McDonald’s trap.

“I’m coming.”

My eyes widened. I was shocked, I was the first officer to catch the famous

Black Jay. The first. Oh.

My.

God.

“I can’t believe it, Jane. You did it. You finally got him. Epee!” I was so excited, I put the file down, took my gun, got in my car, and drove straight to where Dames was.

I think I broke laws while driving, but I couldn’t wait to see my little headache in handcuffs. Finally, I arrived, and breaking a few laws to come here was actually worth it. Yes, we had caught him in public, yes, we had not caught him on the crime scene, but in the last few months, catching him had become *impossible*.

I stared at the scene. He was in handcuffs, and my officers were surrounding him. He looked bored and seemed to have annoyed the officers. “Can I sit down?” he asked in an innocent voice. Officer Dames made irritated gestures with his hands and made irritated faces. “No, and shut up, will you?”

I laughed, and Dames realized my presence. “Perfect timing. He’s been driving me crazy for the last hour.”

“How did you catch him?” I questioned

“I’ll fill you in on it later. How about we put him in the prisoner van right now”

“You do that, and I’ll head back to the station. Just wanted to check things out myself, but it looks like you’ve got things under control. Okay see you later.” Dames looked like he wanted to protest, but I had to report to the head office and get my promotion.

I got back in my car and went to the police station. Once there, I called the head office, and it seemed like my life was going to be great.

Few Days Later…..

As I walked into my new office, a thought occurred to me that I should be thanking the person because of whom I was in this position. I called an officer to send the famous Jay into my office.

I looked him up and down. He didn’t have handcuffs. I wanted him in his full show-off, hand-gesturing form. Right now, he was sitting in the chair opposite mine.

“I heard from a fellow officer that you were not on a crime hunt but there only for lunch. It seems to explain why you were alone. But let’s leave that aside. I called you here to thank you for all this. Catching a criminal like you and then putting him away in prison made me quite a famous officer, and I even got a promotion. So thank you”.

He looked down, then back to me with his sly, calm smile. “Look, officer—“

His eyes seemed to have frozen on the spot, which I realized was my name plate, and his smile faltered for a small moment, but enough for me to notice. For a second, he seemed lost or words.

Then it disappeared, and his smile appeared again. He continued, though his voice sounded hollow and cold.

“—Beracove, how round the world is!” he reached into his pocket and took something out. It was a photograph. “You caught your own brother.” He showed me the photograph. “I guess siblings always help each other one way or another, like I helped you get a promotion.”

I stared at the photograph. There was 12-year-old me, my mom, and in her arms… my 2-year-old brother. It was the one and only photograph I hadn’t taken and left for my brother. My brother couldn’t be a criminal. No. My heart wouldn’t believe it, but my mind did. He had the same almond-brown wavy hair, the same greyish-blue eyes, and the olive skin tone. He was the same age as my brother should be, and he had recognized me from my name. Also, the last horrible fact was that Jay could be short for…Jaden.

I was so shocked I didn’t notice the grin spreading on his face or the glee in his eyes. I didn’t feel the pain when he punched me, and I couldn’t move or utter a word when he opened the window and jumped out the window or when he waved back at me and shouted, “Sayonara, princess”.

I ran as fast as I could. It was her, her. It was Jane. It had to be her, Jane Beracove, my Jaden Beracove’s sister, my sister. I felt crushed under all those emotions I’d hidden deep down for 10 years. Why did have to be her? The person who took away my childhood, my innocence, my right to educate, my place in society, my every single right. The one who turned me into a *criminal*. She, she herself became something like a *police officer*. Why was life so *unfair*, huh? Why?

I stopped running. No, Jaden, you can’t cry, not like you used to. No, you’re all grown up. You’re not like back then when you used to cry in a corner. No, never again will I feel so hopeless and weak.

Never.

10 Years Ago….

“Yes, yes, yes I understand. Yes, thank you, thank you very much. Yes, I’ll be there, I’ll be there. Thank you so much. Good day to you too, sir.” Jane hung up the phone, then let out a deep sigh. She started giggling and kept making excited gestures. After 2 years and 4 months, Jane heard herself truly laugh, and not just halfheartedly. The girl was bursting with joy.

Her brother, who was 7, Jane was 17 at the time, looked at her suspiciously and asked her questions about why she was so happy. He followed her around the house, asking questions and being his usual annoying self, to her room. His sister looked awfully happy.

Jane didn’t start explain till half her stuff—clothes, shoes, some makeup, a hair brush, jewelry, and some other things—was in her school bag.

“I am going to the police academy.”

“WE’RE GOING TO THE POLICE ACADEMY!” He now bursting with joy, running around the house screaming “YAY” at the top of his lungs.

“No, Jades, not we, ***I***. You’re staying home,” his sister corrected him. His

joy seemed to be lost “Oh… how long will you be gone?”

“Honestly, Jades, I don’t know. Really long, I

guess.” “But what about me? Who’ll take

care of me?”

“Jaden, you can take care of yourself. It’s really easy.” She

laughed hesitantly. “But—“

“Look, I took care of both of us at age 15.

Both of us”. “But I’m only 7—“

“Did I not say both of us, Jaden? You’re only going to carry your own burden. It’s not like you have a kid to feed and be the mom of.” Her voice was getting higher as the more she talked, almost shouting the last part.

“What would I do without you here?”

Anger flooded through Jane, and she lost her temper. “Do whatever you want. Live one way or another. I can’t take your burden anymore. I can’t go around working as a waitress and serving people, trying my best to keep everybody happy. I feel like I’m suffocating under your burden. You’re too much, and I’m only 17. I want to live my dreams like every other

girl my age. I want to be someone when I grow older, live and die a happy life. Life is giving me a chance, and I’m

taking it. You are not my responsibility because I am not your mother, she's dead. So if you don't have a place to live or foods to eat, go to an orphanage. That's why they're open in the first place".

Jane Beracove went out that door to follow

her dreams. Jaden Beracove went out that

door to survive in life.

Life isn't fair. To one sibling, Jane's departure was a chance for a better life. To the other sibling, it was his childhood walking out the door.

Jane joined the police academy at the same second as Jaden joined Darkside.

Author’s Note

First of all I’d like to say… Finally!

Secondly I’d like to say: I’m not self-obsessed, I dedicated this book to myself, because I didn’t want anyone else to be like, “Oh you dedicated your novel to me, you love me.” Specifically my sister: Bana, Baina, B-man, Banana, I’m-never-calling-her-Behna, Beens, whatever she likes.

Let’s start from the start. I loved making stories, in fact I’m famous for talking to myself among my family. Every time I made a story, everyone would tell me “write it down”, but I didn’t, because I was little. Then one day I did write it down, but slowly, I started losing motivation. I didn’t like my story, or the hero’s sacrifice. I tried to keep going, but my mind stopped making fantasy stories about magic schools or shape-shifting sticks. Then one day, my mind stopped making stories at all. I felt so awfully empty, and I realized it was the novel I was writing that was doing that to me.

I didn’t quit it, I just took a break. My 6th grade finals were going on. It was Ramadan, the best Ramadan of my life. I was 12 years old. I used go on walks with Baji and Bhai, sometimes Appi too. Every time, I’d go on and on about my novel. I could tell my siblings hated it. I used to stay up all night studying and waiting for Sehri, and in the final hour when I was done studying, I’d watch Number 24 anime.

During my preparation for my exams, I used the white board. I loved wasting the markers on it; I’d draw hearts and fill them horizontally, or I’d shade a square and draw a heart with my fingers. I got bored of the hearts soon, so I started writing on it; small notes showing my certain obsessions. For example, ‘I am the best person on Earth’, or ‘Nico-di-Angelo Rocks’. I wrote all sorts of things on it. Then one day, I wrote ‘A villain forever’ on it. I know that sounds lame, but I was 12!

Anyway, I used to watch Zak Storm on TV, and it had just ended on a cliffhanger. I think all kids know what we do next, we continue the story ourselves, and so I did. I imagined my version of Zak Storm, you all can see where this is heading (Nico fan here), and I was obsessed with traumatized, sick, too powerful, heroes. I imagined my Zak Storm to be smart, cunning, and scarred. But if anyone’s seen Zak Storm, they’d know that that is IMPOSSIBLE. So I decided to make my own story.

This new person, he was a good guy, but he was trapped in some scheme

first, then I didn’t like that, so then he survived and decided to take revenge, and then I didn’t like that either, so he was a villain altogether. What stayed from Zak Storm, was the ship. But every ship needs a crew too. Anyways, this one didn’t have any yet.

You know how we all go through that one phase in life where are absolutely obsessed with a name, that was Jaden for me. I'd recently gotten out of (and didn't know that I was about to go back into it 2 years later) the William, Peter, and so on, stage. So Jaden was way too different and cool! BAM! This new captain was Jaden, and because Jaden wasn't as cool alone, Kios Jaden. I don't know how I made the word Kios; I just know that I wasn't paying attention to Science when I did. All I knew at this point was, he's not a hero, he's an anti-hero.

Then the next day, once I wrote the name on the board, KIOS JADEN, A VILLAIN FOREVER, I thought up a new character, completely un-related to Kios Jaden: Othrera Nefoura. I admit, I stole the first name from Heroes of Olympus the Son of Neptune. But Nefoura is completely original. I made the entire world, how she was a star (definitely not fascinated by Chronicles of Narnia, Book 3) with beautiful hair and you know. Then I realized how dramatic that sounded and BAM! She's a serial killer. I didn't need to think much, I'd just gotten two villains in one exam season! I needed two more.

Theo's name was never decided until I wrote everything down. He wasn't Theodore or adorable but a very gentlemanly and sophisticated thief. Kigel's name was similar, though I had decided Nathanial but that sounded lame after I stopped watching Miraculous Ladybug (Nathan is still cool though). And I might've forgotten. The story was still raw. Not everything was decided.

Then one day, I told Baji "Zo taata yo kisai vaorom" (Can I tell you a story) (Pashto). She said yes because what else could she say. I debated **a lot** about how it started and in the end I settled on a girl finding the diaries to give the real effect. I told her the entire story, explaining the Rare Lands, the names of places on spot. The more I told her, the more interested she seemed, asking me questions and guiding me and everything. I'd say I came up with about most of everything else in that park; the writing in blood, the Rare Landers being perfect, Kios entering through the gate, his parents, everything.

Then my sister asked me why I wasn't writing this down and I ranted about the other boring novel I was writing and she told me, so quit. Now you might think it took long to quit: it didn't. I quit in a week. I had bought a new register for my old novel, two pages in, I left it and put the heading Rare Lands. The original title. Bana interfered by telling me to write a story she loved but no! I loved this story and so I wrote it. It took me two years to finish because despite everything, I was losing motivation. I wanted to be someone else, a person who was amazing at Volleyball, and interacted with everyone, basically not some who ranted about her novels all the time (also

might’ve been a crazy reader).

Volleyball was my most depressing part of life. I hated myself for not being good at it despite playing it for two years. I had a surgery and a gap came in volleyball. Two weeks later, I quit. I didn’t have anything to do in break time, so I started writing my novel. Now I didn’t intend for it to happen, but it did: my entire class found out. Now I’d started writing mid-November. But my

friends' constantly (specifically Chana Pikora) asked me about it every.single.day. Under that pressure, I finished writing it in a month.

I was of course finished with writing it down, not typing it down. Oh yeah, that too an entire 2 months. I'll be honest, I was turning crazy. I used to write day and night. I didn't do anything but type.

And then I was done. I told Baba, and he arranged for me to talk to his friend, who was an expert on this sorta thing. So the next step (after a lot of Reddit research) was proofreading. We got a hard copy, I cried, literally, my classmates cheered, SRK made my cover, HH asked for the pdf, I sent it, she became my first reader, Biya announced herself my first fan. Then Baba found a proofreader very soon. And so started the wait, almost 6 months of wait, until Baba told me, the proofreader had gone to England and could not get it done. That made me sad.

During these months, I'd grown so tired of waiting, I started my second novel. I heard a lot of "You're in ninth grade" but did I care, I did not. Without writing, knowing I was doing what I loved, I couldn't, can't, and could never study. Then in July, I gave my novel for proofreading to someone else. They didn't proofread it, they gave me a review. Now that got done within a week, and I was overjoyed only to find out it was a review (we need more emoticons turning into emojis).

I needed a name for my novel, and a proofreader. I used Chatgpt for both. Of course I finished proofreading within a week. Now using Chatgpt for proofreading is hard. You have to copy paste paragraph by paragraph and then squint your eyes to see the commas and whatever. I'm telling you, I saw commas and semi-colons everywhere. Finally I was done on 7th August and I went to my favorite F-10 book old book shop, whose owner had guided me many times during this journey, and took the number of Bookileaks Publishing House. Baba handled the rest. I don't know when the books will come. I'm writing this right now when I know nothing of what my physical book will look like. What it'll feel like. The only reason I said Finally! Was because I've been imagining this moment since I started writing my first, flop, novel

This was supposed to be the acknowledgements but I think we all authors know, it never goes the way we plan, because at some point, we lose control, our fingers take over, playing their favorite game on the key-board.

See I didn't plan that soppy speech either. I didn't plan to write this here while feeling like I might cry either.

That short story I added, I did it because I wanted it read by at least 1 person. I won a shield for getting third place in an all-Pakistan short story

writing competition with that story. I’m very disappointed to say, but not a single person in my family, other than Mina, Dija, and Bana (she helped me write), no one read it. They’ve all supported me a great deal, but I know that they’ll

never read this novel either, just like they never read that short story. I didn’t intend to them, but my fingers took over.

I love them a lot, they are the best family ever, but sometimes, I just wish I could tell them a lot of things. Things like: (things that I can’t write here, because I’m still hoping, they read this.
Things that I wrote, cried along with it, and then back-spaced it all).

Anyway, Time to predict the future: I’m gonna cry when I see the

physical copy. Okay, whoa, this is literally 4 pages long! That was

not my intention.

Acknowledgements

Thank you Baji, for making me start this journey. Without her, I'd still be writing a novel people said was the copy of Harry Potter.

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Thank you Bhai, who let me permanently borrow his laptop. Without it, I wouldn't have been able to type my first unsuccessful novel and writing a novel would never have been my passion. Also, thank you soooooo much for forcefully buying me Oliver Twist when I was 9, it was my first and favorite novel ever, even if it was the children's version. And for buying me the latest Percy Jackson book of 2023, best birthday gift ever!

Thank you Appi (she thinks I'm doing it just to thank her for something), who introduced me to the world of novels, Harry Potter. I wouldn't have dreamed of writing one had I not read one.

Thank you Baba, who has been my support, my backbone, and my hero. (It is taboo to write or say 'I love you' in our family (lol) so I'm not doing that). I'm saying less because Baba has been the most supportive figure in my life.

Thank you Mama, because she's my Mama, she loves me, I love her back. Mama has always supported me, and been proud of me. She even told the doctor I was a writer! Sure she says it like "Yeah she's too delusional, and she talks to herself all day" but I know that means she's proud of me .

Thank you Aanie, for motivating me so much and being the first to

call me an author. Thank you Chandgul, for helping out as much as

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Thank you Shireen for being an amazing friend and cover artist. I have to say, the cover feels like it's right out of my imagination and it's super good so stop doubting yourself. If you guys want your cover designed by her, DM her on coversbyshireen@gmail.com

Thank you Nadeem Uncle, thank you soooo much! Your book shop is like a second home, and your without you guidance and help and giving me the publisher's number, I wouldn't have made it this far.

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Thank you to my wee lil Bubbles, for having telepathic communications with me so I didn't think I was going crazy talking to myself. You even had a guest appearance as Kios Jaden's first love. (I love you soooooo much) (Bubbles is my pretty blue stuffed dino)

And last but Most, thank you, my favorite authors, for motivating me and being someone I could look up to. Charles Dickens, and Uncle Rick. I am so glad I got to read your novels. The first novel I read was Oliver Twist, and the novel which I can call my cornerstone, is the entire PJO Universe.

Thank you to everyone who I couldn't mention here but has helped me, and thank you to anyone who reads this.

I hope this novel is a little something different, between grim-dark, diary of a wimpy kid vibe, cool hero vibe, no such thing as hero's instinct vibe, what I think is a very chill novel vibe.
Thank you for reading, I hope you loved Kios Jaden as

much as I did. Signing off,

Mahnoor Naeem.